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Comment

A new collection of short pieces by Günther Grass, *Two States – One Nation?,* mostly arguing against German unification, is not very impressive. It just has been published and already is dated. But it affords some insight into the persistence of seemingly left attitudes. I say seemingly, because many stances popularly associated with the left, particularly those taken by Grass, have little or nothing to do with the traditional left, the left of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. (I do not recall any of those seminal revolutionaries being against a unified Germany.) They are mostly an aggregate of views that people who regard themselves as radicals hold singly or in combination. It is a kind of theoretical tautology. The fact is that now that Marxism, communism, and socialism have been declared to be defunct in the Soviet Union and Central Europe, doctrines that used to be considered authentically left are floating in the West without any historical anchors. Even earlier, Koestler said Russia is not left, it is East. Today, the idea of the left has been detached from any specific lands, traditions, or goals. It is an amorphous combination of old, vague liberal attitudes and new trends, theories, and causes.

But what keeps it alive? What gives it its air of moral superiority? Günther Grass's book suggests some of the answers to this question. Most of the pieces in the book are loaded with doubletalk and sophistry. For example, he refers to Russia both as "socialist-communist" and as warped by Stalinism. He also speaks of East German culture as though it had developed freely and organically. But the essays do have a general direction or a common theme. Grass has been against German reunification for some time and has advocated instead a vague entity, what he calls a "confederation of two states." His arguments are the familiar ones: a unified Germany would be too powerful and too dangerous; it would revive the nationalist fervor that sustained the Nazis; it would destabilize relations with the rest of Europe and America. These arguments are not only familiar, but they have been overtaken by history. They are entirely speculative about the future, and they ignore the historical circumstances that made the rise of Hitler possible. For one thing, a punitive Versailles Treaty had left Germany economically shattered and socially demoralized. And the politics of the Communists, dictated by Stalin, facilitated Hitler's coming to power by dividing the opposition.

But the telltale aspects of the case Grass tries to make lie in his general political views. Thus he still both argues and takes for granted

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that Russia and America are equally bad; and he lumps the failings of West Germany and East Germany. Generally, he equalizes the faults of capitalism and the evils of what he calls "socialism." And while he emphasizes, quite properly, the horrors of Nazism, he plays down those of Stalinism. *Gulag* is scarcely mentioned. Grass also makes no distinction between America and the more highly developed welfare state of West Germany.

Why, we might ask, does a man with his abilities make such amateur political mistakes? One of the reasons, I might venture to say, lies in the overwhelming and paralyzing guilt to which he consigns the entire German nation and in the guilt he takes upon himself. As an adolescent, Grass tells us, he was a member of a Nazi youth organization, and he served patriotically but in a subsidiary role in the German army. Such personal motivations, we know, have a strong influence. But should not Grass be aware that guilt cannot be inflated into a political worldview? Nor does it explain his conflation of Russia and America.

Clearly, there are other factors. For an echo of Marxist ideas can be heard in Grass's thinking. His insistence, for example, that he has no fatherland – an important point in his position against unification – reminds one of Marx's statement that the workers have no fatherland. And his arguments against unification repeat themes favored by the left before Gorbachev and the demise of Marxism and socialism in the East. Still, the question persists as to why someone like Grass holds these opinions even now, as the later pieces in the book indicate. Perhaps some explanation can be found in the fact that while the basic doctrines of Marxism and communism have experienced historic refutation, no new radical doctrines, other than the trendy causes now occupying the space of radicalism, have arisen to take their place. Hence the genre of goodwill but muddled thinking keeps people in the political mode they grew up with, and which they have come to think of not only as the radical mind but also as the moral and political avenue to the future. Grass, for example, still talks of democratizing socialism in Russia. Inertia, which is usually thought of as a conservative force, also acts to keep outworn radical ideas going.

W. P.

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MANÈS SPERBER

The Unheeded Warning

At age forty-two Willi Münzenberg was taking giant steps toward the zenith of his unusual career. His name was already known far beyond Germany's borders, and all over the world, in the Communist movement and the countless organizations of sympathizers, particularly among intellectuals in many countries, this propagandist of the Comintern achieved the most astounding success under different names and with variable methods. Lenin, who had come to appreciate Willi in Switzerland during the war, asked him to start a solidarity action in the Volga areas during the famine. What mattered was not so much material aid as the propagandistic exploitation of humanitarian endeavors in behalf of the Bolshevik regime. Thus the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe [International Workers' Relief Organization] came into being under Willi's direction. It only appeared to be a competitor of the Rote Hilfe [Red Aid], for the IAH was primarily intended to organize the solidarity aroused by it – that is, to capitalize on it in founding anticolonialistic, anti-imperialistic, and anti-Fascist associations. In their name Willi's people then organized international conventions and created publishing firms, book clubs, newspapers, and periodicals as well as the Soviet film collective Meschrabpon that quickly became famous. *Berlin am Morgen* [*Berlin in the Morning*] and *Die Welt am Abend* [*The World in the Evening*] were two very skillfully edited dailies that attracted far more readers than *Die Rote Fahne* [*The Red Flag*], the central organ of the German Communist Party. Willi placed Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse, the widow of Sun Yat-sen, and other well-known figures at the head of international movements against imperialism, colonialism, war, and Fascism. The local groups that were spread over the entire world were supplied with slogans in keeping with a party line that had to be

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Editor's Note: These two excerpts are taken from Manès Sperber's three-volume autobiography, *All Our Yesterdays, Volume Two: The Unheeded Warning, 1918-1933*, translated by Harry Zohn, published by Holmes & Meier, New York, NY, pp. 168-70, 180-89. Copyright © 1991 Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc.

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followed. The propagandistic literature that was translated into many languages was for the most part mediocre and repetitive even though it appeared under the name of famous men, including world-renowned writers. In the realm of the intellectuals Münzenberg became a pied piper, and the whole world was his Hamelin. He issued a call and the signatures came – for appeals in behalf of starving and politically persecuted people, colonial peoples or innocently sentenced Negroes, non-Communist writers, philosophers, and clergymen, though most of the last group were actually secret agents of the Comintern.

For good and less good reasons Münzenberg's propaganda appealed especially to intellectuals, and thus he found it easy to perfect an instrument of propaganda that never went out of fashion: the "signature stamp." He induced writers, artists, bishops, philosophers, and scholars of all kinds to testify with their signatures that they were placing themselves in the front ranks of radical fighters. All they had to do was to protest every time he wanted to issue an enthusiastic appeal for action, or to proclaim their horror at heinous deeds. Münzenberg assembled caravans of intellectuals who set themselves in motion whenever he beckoned, and in a direction determined by him. Once a name had appeared under a half-dozen declarations submitted by Münzenberg's associates, it was used subsequently without the express permission of the person involved. It became the pleasant habit of countless intellectuals to see their names printed over and over again in the morning paper next to much more famous or less well-known names. It is a known fact that Münzenberg's "stamp" is, *mutatis mutandis*, still rendering good services.

Before I had met Münzenberg I knew, as so many others did, that he was not very choosy in recruiting capable men for his staff. His instinct guided him in his search for *serviceable* people, but their abilities were not allowed to diminish their obedience and loyalty to him.

A few years later our emigration brought us together, but we had met only twice before that. Willi was short, but his disproportionately long torso made him appear quite tall when he was sitting down, and his clean-shaven face remained ageless. When he was thinking something over and trying to make a quick decision, his eyes would fasten on some object in the room and sometimes, as though accidentally, on the face of the person with whom he was conversing. The tension eased when he made his decision and knew what orders he could give. The son of a village innkeeper, he had been orphaned at an early age and his first job had been that of a "last-boy" in an Erfurt shoe factory. He did not use the authority he had over many people like an entrepreneur or a senior officer commanding a troop, but like a general directing battles from his headquarters without getting close to the front. Yes, Willi, who had

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preserved his native dialect unabashedly, was a truly outstanding organizer, a leader who had discovered at a very early stage that no one can lead and execute at the same time.

At the Reichstag elections of November 1932 the NSDAP received 11,750,000 votes, the SPD 7,250,000, and the KPD around six million; thus the two workers' parties combined were still far stronger than the Nazis. But the Communist leadership stuck to its party line and kept making such statements as this one: "The SPD continues to be the main social pillar of the bourgeoisie. Our main strategic task continues to be to direct the main thrust within the working class against the SPD in an effort to wean millions of workers from fealty to the SPD leaders. Any neglect of our struggle against the social-fascist leaders, any blurring of the basic differences between us and the SPD, any capitulation to the slogans of the SPD leadership, and even the slightest concession to the opportunistic ideology would endanger the implementation of our revolutionary mass policies." Even after Hitler's accession to power the leadership of the KPD repeated such declarations with the same clichés.

In the streets of *red Berlin* one encountered with increasing frequency the brown uniforms of the SA and the black ones of the SS. In the workers' districts, where these uniforms were even more numerous than in the middle-class neighborhoods, there were daily clashes between SA people and the RFB, the Roter Frontkämpferbund, and there were many injuries on both sides, not infrequently deaths as well. It was evident that the crisis was coming to a head; Germany had to decide whether it wanted to be red or brown. Were we in a revolutionary situation, then? The objective preconditions were there, but what about the so-called subjective ones? The majority of the working class voted Social Democratic but continued to support the reformist unions and to have confidence in the SPD. The constant appeals to form a united red front went unheeded, because the KP was busy directing "the main thrust . . . against the SPD." Thus the non-Communists perceived the tactic of a united front as insincere and even a foolhardy maneuver to which no sensible person could concede any chance of success. How could one speak of a revolutionary situation in this case?

Until then "unity," "front," and "struggle" had remained empty slogans. Now, however, it was a matter of existing or being ruined, and a union of all leftist forces was an immediate necessity. At that point something incredible and monstrous suddenly happened: A strike of the Berlin transportation workers called by the organized National Socialist cells and directed against the Social Democratic municipal government was supported by the Communists; the red opposition in the union

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joined the strike and thus helped to paralyze the city's transportation system. Walter Ulbricht, whose rapid rise no one foresaw at the time, headed the Communist strike committee on instructions from the Party.

The confusion of those November days was to cause an increasing paralysis of the will to action and produce an apathy which at the decisive moment bore an alarming resemblance to a tendency to play possum. In a plebiscite held fifteen months earlier the KP had, on express orders from Stalin, voted, also at the last moment, to depose the Socialist coalition government of Prussia, and a year later the KP had called for a general strike in favor of the reinstatement of the same government. And was one now supposed to join with the Nazis against the working population of Berlin? "Teddy" (which is what Ernst Thälmann was called) must know best. People like us can't have an overall view. It simply is like in wartime: Shut your trap and keep serving." That was what the members of the KP told themselves and the way the leaders of their cell, the organizational and political leaders of the subdistrict, explained it to them. In their newspapers they read that the social-fascist capitalistic lackeys would once again get their heads bloodied in their assault on the strategy and tactics of the KP. Did the "lower functionaries" and the furious newspaper articles and leaflets convince the thunderstruck adherents? Where was their sound common sense, and why did the Berliners allow their proverbial clearheadedness to be muddied?

There were several political and even more numerous psychological reasons for this. In the first place, the Communists, who were constantly engaged in a total, absolute opposition, had proclaimed a crisis in the midst of prosperity and demanded the destruction of a system which, they claimed, was bound to cause even greater misery for a growing number of people. Since 1929 their propaganda had been repeating that the Communists had been right, which certainly was convincing. In the second place, in the entire world there was only one country without unemployment—the Soviet Union, one-sixth of the earth, which the Bolsheviks had liberated from the capitalistic yoke. Thus it was necessary to learn from them in order to follow their example. Since the leadership of the KPD was doing exactly that, people should trust it, and it was going to lead the German proletariat to victory via the most direct route.

In addition, there were reasons that made even skeptics shrink from leaving the Party. Anyone who had belonged to an industrial or residential cell for any length of time rightly feared that, if he broke away, he would first be treated as a renegade, then as a parasite, and finally as an enemy – and by the very people who constituted his

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immediate surroundings and to whom he felt all the more bound because his open espousal of the party line had isolated him from everyone else – his brothers, his fellow workers, and all his friends. Like elite corps and secret societies, extremist groups establish themselves as closed milieus that make defectors anathema. Added to this was the fact that even in those gloomy November days no Communist sincerely believed that the Social Democrats would be the enemy in the impending civil war. Everyone was certain that the most difficult and most dangerous struggles were ahead and that these would be against the SA, the SS, and perhaps also the Stahlhelm, a reactionary association of front-line veterans, and certainly not against the Socialist or the Catholic workers. That is why anyone who did not want to seem a coward had to stick with the Party.

I continued my work but gradually decreased its volume, for I wanted to have time for all contacts that might become necessary from one moment to the next. Every day I had many meetings with activists of the youth association, responsible Party people, comrades from abroad who were working for international organizations in Berlin, Yugoslavs, and of course with friends, most frequently with Houtermans and his wife Charlotte, in whose house we often carried on discussions till late at night. We were particularly concerned with a suspicion that finally became inescapable: What if that twaddle about the social-fascist enemy number one was not based on error and delusion? What if the exacerbation of dissension within the workers' movement amid deafening calls for a united front was not the result of an addle-brained misinterpretation of the situation and the true balance of power but, on the contrary, was the unerring application of a policy that did not have the victory of the German proletariat as its primary aim but accommodated itself in advance to Hitler's victory and therefore refrained from doing anything that might actually facilitate a united front against him? In that case, but only then, the Nazi-Communist strike was an excellent move, for now no union and no Social Democrat could regard the united front as anything but a shamelessly stupid subterfuge.

Yes, but . . . But why should the Russians, why should Stalin, not only prevent a revolution in Germany but wish to abandon the entire workers' movement to the victorious Nazis? Only to get rid of the Social Democratic Party and the reformist unions?

We regarded ourselves as intelligent young people. Our political and historical education was above average, and our revolution-mindedness was unshakable, but so was our determination to know the truth. We were still incapable of despair, though for days and weeks we had constantly been oppressed by the feeling that everything was far more

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threatening than we could fathom and that we must act immediately. Danton's threefold *"De l'audace"* had been cited by Marx, Lenin, and everyone who wanted to characterize the law of revolutionary action. Where was our boldness now?

We were not the only ones who could not bring themselves to believe that the KPD would fight Hitler's seizure of power only with words and not with weapons, nor the only ones who did not *permit* themselves to despair. Without great illusions or romantic effusions, without any pathos or confidence of victory, hundreds of thousands prepared in that gloomy autumn to risk their lives in an armed resistance that would be meaningful even if defeat were as good as certain. Without belief in the imminent struggle we would have despaired and been forced to abandon not only the cause but ourselves, the meaning of our lives. Yes, there were hundreds of thousands who needed to think along those lines in order to endure the past, the future, and themselves.

One day it happened that in the seminar on social policy at the Hochschule für Politik eight students placed their notebooks and books on their desks and ostentatiously shut them at the precise moment I began my lecture. It was certain that there were several Nazis among my students, but up to that day they had not expressed their convictions in disturbing fashion. Again and again I glanced at the desks of these young people, who were exhibiting their negative stance with folded arms and by staring into space, but I managed to lecture as though nothing had happened. However, when the same scene was repeated a few days later, I remained silent for a while on my rostrum, looked at each of the demonstrators, and then said something like the following: "If you could see yourselves through my eyes, you would be frightened by the way your faces are changed – because you are following orders in doing something that would be repugnant to you if you could permit yourselves an independent judgment. As for my use of the familiar form of address, *ihr* rather than *Sie*, you can think about it while you follow orders and don't listen to me."

Three students later apologized. One wrote me a long letter, another begged my pardon by telephone, and a third waited for me at the front door; each of them wanted this to remain a secret between us. All three emphasized that they regretted their conduct, but only because it concerned me. As far as the cause was concerned, however, any personal consideration was out of the question; as a Communist I ought to understand this quite well. The athletic young man by the front door added these words to his declaration, which he had presented in a hoarse voice: "By the way, you will see that we National Socialists will put

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into practice precisely what you are aiming for, because we take social liberation just as seriously as national liberation." I answered him, "I shall see nothing and you will see nothing . . . Hitler wants war. We shall meet again in concord – yes, in a mass grave. . . . " The student wanted to make some reply, but I did not give him a chance to do so.

The country lived in a state of civil war that was not fought simultaneously everywhere but flared up here and there. Everywhere, however, particularly in the cities, there was a civil-war atmosphere – not only in the streets that echoed with provocative chants of hate, wild threats, and shots, but also in countless rallies, where so-called *Saalschlachten* [public brawls] took place every evening. Family members, neighbors, and people employed in the same workshop stopped talking to one another, and of course so did the normally very eloquent intellectuals. It was as though the political affiliation of talkers gave certain words a completely different, usually antithetical meaning. In a Babylonian confusion of tongues everyone knows that the others do not pervert the meaning of words only with evil intent but also because they are stupid or unprincipled.

Any member of the German left was apt to believe that with rare exceptions all principled, intelligent people were on the left and that all genuine intellectuals who had not sold out to the bourgeoisie were on that side. Every intellectual knew how to use appropriate quotations from Marx, Lenin, and Engels, and thanks to the Marxist crisis theory he was able to demonstrate that *decaying* capitalism was approaching its inevitable end on forced marches and that the bourgeoisie, particularly monopolistic capitalism, had to hoist Mussolini and Hitler into the saddle in order to delay the victory of the proletarian revolution. Only rarely did someone disturb the mood created by such a convincing explanation by saying, "If more than thirteen million vote for Hitler, undoubtedly including hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers, this probably can't be explained by saying that the capitalists are financing his propaganda and his uniformed troops. Conversely, the more successful Hitler is, the more money they give him. Why do twice as many people believe the promises of the Nazis than believe those of the Communists?"

Only seldom did someone attempt to investigate the uncommon appeal of the Nazis. The watchword remained "The worse, the better" – that is, it was regarded as certain that economic hardship was a revolutionary factor. Despite what the German proverb says, hardship does not teach people to pray; it teaches them to fight, to fight against the enemies of the working class and against the *system* that must constantly be exposed and utterly destroyed. Incidentally, the Nazis

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inveighed against the *system* as well, and they, too, promised to smash it upon seizing power. They did not settle for anyone being in *partial* agreement with them any more than the Communists did; they demanded *unconditional* agreement and even subservience. Anyone who did not submit joyously was not just an opponent but an enemy. The number of the Germans who did not want to be regarded as enemies and threatened by the Nazis increased with the economic distress of the people and proportionately to the growing number of those whom the inaction of the non-Nazis and anti-Nazis – in the government, in the center, and on the left – led to believe in the victory of the Nazis. The transformation happened step by step, but one step followed another at an ever more rapid pace. Many people stopped making anti-Hitler remarks in the presence of strangers, and they made such remarks more and more infrequently even within their family circle or in conversations with neighbors. Then it turned out that Hitler's opponents were greatly exaggerating, that they underestimated him, and that their hatred blinded them to his oratorical talent and his idealism. When Nazis were within earshot, people repeated more and more frequently that Hitler, after all, only wanted the best for the entire German people.

Another explanation for the apathy of large parts of the population, as manifested in those fateful months, is the confusing and ultimately paradoxically neutralizing effect of thinking in terms of an enemy. Wherever this type of thinking proliferates in the world, and no matter what ideology it is based upon, it impels both the enthusiastic and the timorous to submit to a dictatorship – for isn't everything six of one and half a dozen of the other, and aren't the Catholic Brüning, the Social Democrat Wels, and Hitler all Fascists?

As for the intellectuals of the far left, despite their better judgment they lived in an atmosphere of a steady ascent. Their poems and songs, their satirical and political plays and cabaret numbers that were performed by countless small troupes in halls, courtyards, and village squares, as well as their books and polemics – all these met with such a great response that it seemed to them as if they were standing at the loom of the times. The Party's speakers were enthusiastic when they returned from their propaganda tours; at all meetings they had encountered a fighting mood such as they had not experienced since the days of the revolution fifteen years previously. At a rally at the end of an agitprop trip Willi Münzenberg was so carried away by his audience's feverish desire for great revolutionary actions that he quoted Ulrich von Hutten's words, *"Es ist eine Lust zu leben!"* ["It is a joy to be alive!"]

Was it, then, revolutionary fervor or resignation of the masses worn down by their misery? What was it now – an unquenchable thirst for

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action or a paralyzing despair? Both could be encountered – simultaneously, side by side, or in rapid succession. As I have said, hundreds of thousands were ready to fight even without any prospect of victory, and under certain circumstances they might have swept along those millions who, without realizing it, were waiting for a sign that would be more convincing than the endless nonsense from the bigmouths. The Social Democrats and the politically unaffiliated also wanted something to be done over the heads of the Party's leadership, something that might unite the split camp again.

Thus it was possible to harbor the boldest hopes one moment and despair again the next. The events that followed one another in ever more rapid succession seemed easy to interpret and yet boggled the mind. Was the world to be greeted with a hopeful "Good morning!" or to be cursed with an angry "Good night"? Again and again the long conversations, which frequently dragged on until after midnight, ended with the cautious confidence that on the next day Moscow would finally abandon its catastrophically wrong line and order an immediate alliance with the SPD and the unions. That day never dawned, and the two parties were at each other's throats as they rushed into the same misfortune.

I don't remember the exact day in January which brought the equally sensational and incredible news that the government had permitted a parade of Nazi troops on Bülowplatz on Sunday the 22nd of the month. All over Germany it was known that the KPD had its headquarters at the Karl Liebknecht House on that square. Its facade was usually covered with giant banners and portraits of leaders, and whenever there was a suitable occasion, blood-red flags with hammer and sickle were raised. There was a rumor that this building was really a fortress with secret subterranean passages and gun emplacements. In point of fact, however, the best protection of the Karl Liebknecht House was afforded by its neighbors, the vast majority of whom were tried-and-tested Communists. What was the purpose of that provocation, then? Was Chancellor Schleicher, the political general whose shrewdness had caused him to be vastly overrated, gambling on the bloody clash that he was forcing on the provoked Communists, and did he expect it to weaken Hitler's reputation and prevent Hindenburg from entrusting him with the formation of a new government? Schleicher was not the only person who was convinced that the Communists would do absolutely anything to deny the Nazis access to Bülowplatz. The general may have counted on being able to mobilize both the police and the Reichswehr [federal army] in this case, and he may have hoped that their successful employment would prove to Hindenburg and the men behind him that only he, Schleicher, was in a position to use the army to prevent a civil war, restore law and

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order throughout the country, and thereafter protect these from both left and right.

Schleicher miscalculated, for on that Sunday the KPD yielded the Bülowplatz to the SA and the SS. While the eyes of everyone in Germany were on that square in those hours, the Nazi formations were able to parade unscathed with their flags and show the world that they had nothing to fear from the present and everything to expect from the immediate future – namely, complete control of Germany.

The KP had not only refrained from mobilizing, let alone deploying, the armed units of the red front-line veterans' association, but it had also strictly prohibited Communists from doing anything that might teach the Nazis that they were unwelcome intruders in that residential neighborhood. The Party had forced its members and sympathizers to *play dead*.

It must be borne in mind that even in periods of great calm, during the years of prosperity and political tranquility, the KPD had continually requested its members, and in fact all German workers, to be ready for an uprising that might not break out immediately but would come by the day after tomorrow. In 1929, when the May Day parade was prohibited, the KP engaged in bloody fights, erected barricades in the Neukölln and Wedding districts, and thoughtlessly and unsuccessfully proclaimed a general strike. However, the closer the acid test came, the more frequently the Party contented itself with politically meaningless defensive actions and acts of violence. To be sure, the capitulation of January 22 could hardly have been justified even if it had been an episode in the bloody clashes between the Nazis and the Communists, but as it was, no one could doubt that the capitulation of the KP was a political fact of the greatest significance.

A few days later, on Wednesday, January 25, a protest demonstration organized by the Party took place in which not only Communists but also Social Democrats and politically unaffiliated people participated. There were thousands of us who slowly moved through the streets on that dark-gray afternoon. There should have been tens or hundreds of thousands, but this time, after Sunday's capitulation, many stayed home because they could not believe that such a demonstration was meaningful or useful. There was no lack of aggressive slogans that were vociferously repeated, particularly at street corners, and directed against all enemies – Schleicher, the police, all traitors, the henchmen of the brown murderers, and so forth.

The wind blew harder and harder and took the breath of the screamers away, which decreased the volume rather than the frequency of their shouts. There were fewer young people among us than usual; the

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majority were middle-aged men, ill-nourished and dressed shabbily and not warmly enough. Some of them wore thin raincoats over worn-out wool vests; they were freezing, and screaming was a strain for them. However, as one of them said, it also warmed them, and so that man kept on screaming even as he shivered. This is what was said in the speeches: Yes, the Bülowplatz belongs to us and the Karl Liebknecht House even more so. The others are going to get their heads bashed in and bloodied. Yes, the day is coming when the German proletariat will square accounts with the capitalists and their lackeys; it will tell them what's what in Russian, following the great example of the Bolsheviks. Raise the flag of Lenin, Stalin, and Thälmann! – Whenever it was time to yell *"Rot Front!"* at once threateningly and hopefully, everyone clenched his fist; it was the "Amen" that interrupted the speeches at appropriate places and finally concluded them.

As darkness fell, the wind became even colder and more biting; it burst into the square from all sides and at times howled as it burrowed between buildings. There were no clashes; no shots were fired, and thus no one was injured. Those who did not live too far away were able to get home in time for supper.

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MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

The Country to Come

It is said that during the Cultural Revolution, the fashionable Chinese curse was, "May you live in interesting times." Ours are, without a doubt, and we have no cause for complaint. Each day surprises us, leaves us open-mouthed at liberty's latest feat in the world: the Berlin Wall coming down, Ceaucescu's fall, Vaclav Havel's transit from the dungeons to the presidency of his country, Violeta Chamorro's triumph in the Nicaraguan elections in spite of all the polls and the wishes of Western "progressives." Watching television, we hardly believe our eyes. We see a Red Square seething with demonstrators demanding free elections. We see the Central Committee of Lenin and Stalin's Communist Party in a rush, like many of its European siblings, to renounce even the most basic axioms of Leninism and Marxism – class struggle, democratic centralism, the monopoly of power, centralized planning, and social ownership of the means of production. After all has been said and done, the Party has renounced virtually all the myths, stereotypes, arguments, and methods by which communism was born, nourished, and empowered to take over a third of humanity, to drag it down into slavery, terror, and ignominy, ultimately eroding itself to the point where it has provoked what seems to be its own deliquescence (at least, as a significant force in the contemporary world).

It is difficult, under the circumstances, not to resort to great pronouncements. Are we not living through a new moment in the course of civilization? Aren't we part of the inauguration of a new era in human history? The word "history," the idea of history, is one of those that has been prostituted for ideology, as it has served, above all, as a front for the great intellectual deceptions of our times. It has been the sinister, all-powerful god of the religion of totalitarianism and the justification for the worst genocides and political crimes in memory. But we need not

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say, as Francis Fukuyama has, that communism's death throes constitute the real Hegelian "end of history." My own impression is that the opposite is true. The successes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have unexpectedly revitalized the very notion of "history" in the eyes of the world, extricating it from the fables, distortions, and fictions with which Marxists – heterodox and orthodox – have denatured it: history's freshness has been restored, its salutary improvidence, its unembraceable (at least not by the intellect or by knowledge) nature, consisting of multiple and spontaneous improvisations, which always breaks apart conceptualizations that purport to reduce it to pure logic, to cause and effect, or disclose, beneath its tumult and phosphorescence, any recondite rationality. Nowadays we can verify what a Karl Popper or a Hayek or a Raymond Aron has always maintained against a Machiavelli, a Vico, a Marx, a Spengler, or a Toynbee: that history is never "written" before it takes place, that it is not the representation of some pre-existing libretto worked out by God, nature, or the unfolding of reason, or by the struggle of classes and the relationships of production. History is, rather, a continual and diverse creation that can choose the most unforeseen trajectories, developments, involutions, and contradictions, always ruining, in its fantastic complexity and multiplicity, whoever is bold enough to predict or explain it.

The directions taken these days – the vindication of the individual against the state, a free economy against a planned one, ownership and private enterprise against collectivism and statism, liberal democracy against dictatorship and mercantilism – justifiably elate us. But this shouldn't mislead us. It wasn't "written." No hidden, latent force, lurking in the catacombs of old-fogeyism and terror that impoverished and humiliated those who have today regained their freedom, determined Ceaucescu's fall, Solidarity's triumph, or the tumbling of the stone that divided Berlin. These events and the others that excite us who have fought totalitarianism for years have been robustly won by the tough resistance, active or passive, of its victims, or by the taking hold of conscience in the governing communist oligarchies (the *nomenklatura*), in its incapacity to resolve economic and social problems, and in the unpardonable disaster towards which their nations were heading unless there were drastic rectifications of ideas, politics, and, of course, leadership.

A formidable victory of the culture of freedom against totalitarianism has occurred, but it is not definitive. Now comes the hard part. The dismantling of the state, the transfer to civil society of political and economic power that was expropriated to its own advantage by a despotic bureaucracy, is an extremely complex process. It is going to require, in the first phase, enormous sacrifices by those who currently deceive them-

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selves with the notion that political democratization and economic freedom will instantly solve all their problems. Not so. To emerge from the psychological numbness and the moral demobilization that every collectivist regime propagates among its citizenry – who are obliged to abdicate their sense of individual responsibility, who live with the alienating assumption that their problems must be resolved by the state in the first place and only on second thought by themselves – will be a task more arduous than any of the moving accomplishments of the last few months, in which we have seen the withering of tyrannies and bureaucracies. For countries like Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union itself, the real revolutionary struggle now begins: to construct a free society from the ruins of moribund socialism. For citizens who are aware that there is no lasting political freedom, much less progress, without economic liberty, and for whom a market economy means discipline, this means strict enforcement of the law, risk-taking, initiative, and, above all, much work and sacrifice. The culture of success – the source of the extraordinary prosperity that advanced democratic societies have obtained – includes also, for the people who have businesses, the possibility of failure and ruination without the state's coming in to lend a hand, and of having, therefore, to start from scratch after a failure. To assume freedom entails likewise the acceptance that one must pay the costs of inefficiency and error. If the free market system generates the most efficiency and creates more wealth than any other, it is also a system that is cold and merciless to the inefficient. This is very much to the point at the threshold of an age in which the possibility of a humanity without wars, an arms race, or superpower blocks, where the common denominator of freedom will link most of the world's people, is taking shape on the horizon. Freedom, always the guarantor of progress and justice, comes with a high price that people must pay daily under penalty of losing it. No countries, neither the richest ones nor those with the greatest democratic traditions, are excused from this peril.

What happened in Eastern Europe is also happening, though in a more attenuated and far less spectacular way, in Latin America. It is a slow process, indirect and not always conscious, yet visible to those who observe without prejudice the continent's recent evolutions. Except for Cuba and Haiti, all of our dictatorships have been replaced by civilian regimes. Democratic governments – though with varying degrees of legitimacy – run our countries from the Rio Grande down to the Straits of Magellan. At the same time, the violent revolutionary myths have lost for us their force, their capacity to unify our rural people, our young people, our workers in the way that the violent revolutionary myths could. These myths, kept alive by certain recalcitrant minorities –

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intellectual and academic elites, or marginal, unassimilable sectors – can still cause much harm, though each day they appear more and more cut off from popular support.

What is really new is that perhaps for the first time, here and there in Latin America, in the midst of the great economic crisis that confronts us, and perhaps as a consequence of it, encouraging signs of pragmatism and modernity have appeared. With few exceptions – such as Peru, much to our dismay – hardly any governments dare to persist in the "Cepalist"* and Keynesian model of the fifties and sixties that still causes such havoc. And a renewed liberalism, in the classical meaning of the term, is opening up a path through the whole continent. It is a salutary response to the models of "development from within" and the famous politics of "substitution of imports" of lamented memory. Almost all the new governments, some enthusiastically, others hesitantly, and others without giving proper due to the reason things happen, are taking the right steps, great or small, to attack the roots of the evil of poverty. It is an evil that has become curable these days (the great accomplishment of our age compared to those past), a condition of which the afflicted countries want to cure themselves. This means, in social and economic terms, that a country can increase technology and get rid of corruption, reducing the state to its proper proportions, in order to guarantee order, justice, and freedom. It means that the right to create wealth, in an open system based on competence, with no privileges or bureaucratic interference, can be transferred to civil society. This does not, of course, imply that the state should give up the deployment of its every imaginable force, in order that each generation enjoy the foundation, next to freedom, of every social democracy: the equality of opportunity, a level playing field for all those who undertake what is expressed by the horrible Darwinian metaphor – the struggle for life. So, in Latin America, little by little, one sees that a government "distributes" more intelligently if it offers an outstanding public education than if it discourages private enterprise with suffocating taxes, and that it works better when private property is accessible to most people than when those who are already owners are fought against.

Economic nationalism – with cultural nationalism, one of the most stubborn aberrations of our history – is, however timidly, beginning to recede, after having contributed very effectively to continental underdevelopment. We finally understand that well-being will not come about through strengthening borders, but in opening them wide to win mar-

*CEPAL is the Spanish acronym for United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

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kets out in the world for our products, so that we can attract technology and capital and ideas from all over the world to help us develop our resources and create the employment we so urgently need. In this new cultural climate, many concede that the "regional integration of Latin America" never worked because it was always weighted down with a spirit of nationalism. It was an effort to integrate in defense against the rest of the world, the famous "imperialists." And yet even with a marked deck, no one played cleanly. Everybody wanted to take advantage of integration for himself. Now, when it finally seems that the supreme political value, common sense, is taking hold over growing numbers of Latin Americans on many levels, integration is being understood in a more modern way: as unification for the purpose of achieving together and as soon as possible the integration of Latin America with the rest of the world. Interjecting ourselves into the world, with an awareness of possibilities, challenges, and markets, is the main tool that poor and backward countries like ours have for ceasing to be that way and becoming modern, that is, prosperous and truly free, since freedom with poverty is freedom that is stunted and imperiled.

Ending nationalism, which has bloodied and divided us, at whose dictates we have squandered huge resourcess on arming ourselves one against the other, is the *sine qua non* of our development and modernization. These same resources could have served in the fight against the real enemies of any nation – not its neighbors, but hunger, ignorance, and backwardness. We must not revert to nationalism, used by bad governments to conciliate or silence opposition, blackmailing by the assertion that "the nation is threatened by foreign enemies" and artificially creating a "national unity." We need to work faithfully to overcome distrust and reticence on both sides – resolving problems harmoniously when they arise – and to succeed through collaboration and diverse exchanges. In this way, as is beginning to occur in Europe and other parts of the world, borders will weaken and dissolve under the beneficient force of friendship, common interest, and shared consciousness; those perseverent demons that have left us so far behind compared to more prosperous areas of the world will be killed off. Fortunately, there are more and more Latin Americans who differentiate clearly between "nationalism" and "patriotism." Despite what Doctor Johnson said in his witticism about scoundrels, patriotism is altruistic, generous, legitimate, a feeling of love for the land in which one was born and where the bones of one's dead are buried, ethical and sentimental within the system of cultural, geographical, and historical references that frame each individual destiny. But even patriotism, with everything in it that is beautiful and noble, cannot be obligatory, as the esteemed and personal experiences of

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sex, friendship, faith, or love could not be, either, without degrading them.

In these times of turmoil and wonder, even the most dreaded and abominable word of all, the most feared word of any kind in twentieth-century Latin American politics – capitalism – is starting to appear, with, it is true, much circumspection and squeamishness, in our public vocabulary. Stripped of the frightful, terrible, negative reverberations of the past, whether we like it or not, objectively, the capitalist system, despite its limitations and blemishes, has been capable of assuring history's greatest progress in terms of collective welfare, social security, protection of human rights, and individual freedom. (This doesn't necessarily mean that, thanks to capitalism, human happiness has been measurably increased. But happiness is not something that can or ought to be measured in social coordinates, only in individual ones. Therefore, as Popper says, happiness is not a matter incumbent upon governments. Those who insist upon realizing it for everyone – the "holistic" governments such as as those of Castro, the Shiite *imams* of Iran, or the antidiluvian survivors in the People's Republic of China – are apt to convert their societies into real hells. Happiness, mysterious and manifold like poetry, is concerned only with itself and its near ones; there aren't any formulas to produce it or explanations to spell it out.) If one wants to escape poverty in the quickest way, in this world where anything is possible, it is necessary clearly and resolutely to choose the free market, private enterprise, and individual initiative, as opposed to statism, collectivism, and populist demagoguery.

Yet there will be grave confusion unless we establish a clear distinction between genuine capitalism – what I would call liberal, something we have never really had in Latin America – and those adulterated forms of "rentism" or mercantile capitalism that until now have germinated in our countries. The latter system of privileges agreed upon between political power and influential business groups guaranteed monopolies and sinecures, safeguarded them from having to compete and to strive to satisfy consumers' needs. It has been an inexhaustible source of inefficiency and corruption in our economies. This is the inevitable result when success in business is decided not in the marketplace but by an obscure bureaucracy issuing decrees. Such a system deforms both business and the businessman, who has to devote his ingenuity and his energy not to serving the consumer but to obtaining privileges from the state. Mercantilism has been one of the main causes of our underdevelopment and of our societies' discrimination against the poor. Mercantilism made justice a privilege obtained by those with access who had influence or could buy it; it condemned the poor to creating work and profit in its margins, in

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those informal economies – doubtless precarious but free – that are in some way the beginnings of an authentic popular capitalism.

To put an end to mercantile practices is a moral and realistic exigency, as is rectifying the so-called social and economic "reforms" that nationalized businesses, collectivized land, and enthroned state intervention in the economy. Mercantilism, collectivism, and statism are different expressions of the same phenomenon that smothers individual initiative, makes the bureaucrat and not the businessman or laborer the protagonist of a productive life, stimulates inefficiency and immorality, legitimizes discrimination and privilege, and sooner or later brings about the deterioration and dissipation of freedom. To establish a free economy, to put an end to monopolies and guarantee access for everyone to the marketplace, where people can compete within the framework of clear, simple, and fair laws, doesn't weaken states. It strengthens them, since it confers upon them the authority and credibility they lack today; states are big, but they are weak and impotent when it comes to providing the basic services one expects from them: health, security, justice, education, a minimal infrastructure. To refuse the state the right to intervene as a producer, effectively fulfilling its role as arbiter and promoter of economic life, does not excuse the state from its essential responsibilities. For example, the state has the responsibility to work tirelessly to keep the marketplace free of the interference and distortions that reduce efficiency and generate abuse; to perfect without let-up the administration of justice, because without a clean, strong, and universal judicial system, to which everyone may apply in defense of their rights, there cannot be a functioning economy; and also, perhaps most of all, to help and encourage the spread of private ownership among those who need it. Private ownership is not theft, as Proudhon believed, but the sustenance and visible sign of liberty. A liberal state is inconceivable without a policy of support for the destitute and vulnerable, those who because of age, nationality, or misfortune are not in a position to take care of themselves, those who would be crushed and blotted out if exposed to the strict laws of the marketplace. When and where would Adam Smith and the other classic thinkers propose indifference to the weak by the state? Certainly, it is the liberal democracies that have the most advanced systems of protection for the elderly, children, the best unemployment, illness, and work-related accident insurance.

There is a realm, above all, where the liberal state has the obligation to take initiative and enlarge itself, investing resources and inciting everyone to action and participation: the cultural. To make all cultural good accessible to everyone, to promote curiosity, interest, and enjoyment in what the human imagination and artistic spirit invent to coun-

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terbalance life's insufficiencies is a way of ensuring that people's sensibilities do not become dulled. At the same time it sharpens up their critical faculties, the discontent without which there is no social change or movement, and which nothing awakens or spurs on so much as a rich cultural life. Of course, the state shouldn't "direct" or even outline the path of cultural activity, or provide any guidelines for it other than that of being free and autonomous. Its function is to guarantee that culture is diverse and manifold, open to all stirrings and provocations, since only if it is exposed in this way to challenges and seductions does it remain linked to current experience, and help people to live, create, desire. Culture does not need to be protected since, when it exists authentically, it protects itself better than any government could. But states do, in fact, have the duty to give to all the means necessary to acquire and produce it, namely education, and the minimal conditions of life adequate to permit the enjoyment of it.

Intense cultural life is, moreover, one of the ways a liberal state can counteract one of the congenital dangers of modern capitalist society: a certain dehumanization, a materialism that isolates the individual, destroys the family, fosters selfishness, loneliness, scepticism, snobbery, cynicism, and other forms of spiritual vacuity. No modern industrial society has yet been able to respond adequately to this challenge. In all of them, the high standards of living and material progress within reach of most people have weakened social solidarity (which, paradoxically, is generally more intense in primitive countries). A proliferation of cults and rituals of a demented irrationality have spawned, whose sole explanation seems to be the unconscious need to replace in some way the sacred, the faith whose loss we evidently cannot resign ourselves to. The drug subculture – perhaps the most formidable modern assault on reason, renouncing among itself and before the whole world the attribute of lucidity, the backbone of the culture of freedom – seems to be one of these exacerbated and tortuous forms that manifest, in highly developed countries, the immemorial appetite for transcendence and the absolute, in earlier times appeased by magic, myth, and religion.

We who are fighting to make our countries more modern through the only system that can bring prosperity without decreasing freedom must learn a lesson from what we observe in the highly developed countries. We must respond imaginatively to the dangers facing any democracy, by means of a policy, based on the same principle that forges market economies and promotes liberal capitalism, of encouraging culture and creativity in all its forms and boldness: artistic work, critical thought, investigation and experiment, the intellectual. And, whatever our intimate convictions might be on the subject of God, we must encourage

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the development of a deep spiritual life. In our tradition religion seems to be the most likely vehicle for reining in the instinct for death and destruction, teaching solidarity, respecting certain ethical codes that guarantee coexistence and order in the city, in a word, for calming and domesticating the terrible savage, avid for excess, that all humanity, even those who appear most civilized, carries within.

As a young man and a conscientious reader of the French existentialists, I could convince myself that a man decides his own destiny completely on the basis of continuous choices, situating himself in ever-changing reality. This belief helped, I think, to turn me into a writer, which I dreamed of being from the time I was very small. But today, in the strange situation I find myself, participating in an election campaign as an aspirant for the presidency of my country, I tell myself with some sadness that when it comes to individual destiny, circumstances and accident influence it perhaps as much as the will of those who embody it. Like the "history" of societies, that of individuals is never "written" beforehand. One must record it each day, without abdicating the right to choose, while knowing that often our choosing does nothing more than validate – lucidly and ethically, if possible – what circumstances and others have already chosen for us. I neither lament nor celebrate it: life is that way, and we have to live with it, respecting it in all its terrible and exciting contingency.

Translated from the Spanish by Don Share, with Diego Jaramillo

Lucy Dawidowicz
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Dona Elizabetchy: A Memoir of Elizabeth Bishop

The first time I saw Elizabeth, she was blowing bubbles from a small, elegantly curved clay pipe. As the iridescent globes of fragility rose on the air, floated hesitantly for an instant, and vanished in the summer sunlight, she followed their ascent to oblivion with an affectionate and watchful eye, then dipped the pipe carefully into the cup of soapy water and blew until she released another bouquet of bubbles. I knew that Elizabeth had been afflicted with chronic asthma since childhood, and I had recently read her strange, gasping poem, "O Breath," each line broken in two by the deep, recuperative caesura. The poem mimed her struggle with the mystery within her lungs ("something moving but invisibly, / and with what clamor"). I was struck by the quiet intensity of her play – with her breath, the soapy water, the fragile clay pipe – and she appeared to me, as I saw her then, as round and neat and bright as the bubbles she was creating with such serious delight.

It was August of 1949, and we were both spending the month at Yaddo, a colony for writers and artists in Saratoga Springs. In the midst of pampered green acres, now heavy with the dust of late-summer heat, stood the eccentric mansion built at the turn of the century by heirs to a railroad fortune. Now its labyrinthine vastness provided a quiet refuge for novelists, painters, poets, and composers. Elizabeth had been given a room in the tower, with its own curved balcony overlooking the courtyard of the neo-Renaissance, neo-Gothic, neo-everything-money-could-buy mansion. A friend in New York who knew Elizabeth had urged me to look for her when I got to Saratoga. I had approached her room, its door open, but I hesitated to disturb her as she leaned against

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the balcony railing, blowing her precious breath away. I watched, and then slipped away.

August is the racing season in Saratoga Springs – or was, forty years ago – and occasionally, when the right words remained stubbornly out of reach and the afternoon seemed longer than eternity, Elizabeth and I stifled our guilt about playing hookey, and sneaked off to the racetrack. With our perfect ignorance about horses and racing, Elizabeth and I would wander around the stables before post time, trying to decide how to place our bets. Elizabeth was fascinated by the names of the horses, and those names dictated our choices. We would risk our money on a nag that had been christened – with such poetic futility! – Flying Dolphin or Speed of Light, the very ones that invariably dragged far behind the others, fated again and again neither to win nor place nor show. But despite our pathetic failures, those afternoons with Elizabeth at the race track were exhilarating. Her tireless eye absorbed the scene with zest, and responded to every detail with witty, contagious pleasure: the crowds swarming in the heat of the day; the tense expectation, palpable as heartbeats, as the horses pounded around the track; the satiny gleam of the jockeys' uniforms; the dark glisten of galloping horseflesh; and finally the triumphant shrieks of the winners and the sour moans of the losers. Elizabeth's attention was absolute, and even when she was silent I was intensely aware of the way she was capturing the roiling motion of the afternoon, always seeing, looking, storing, remembering.

That month in Saratoga was a magical time for me, a month's liberation from workaday routine, a time filled with hours for uninterrupted writing. I glowed with happiness and could not understand why, in this island of perfection, Elizabeth's face was often ashen with misery, why she seemed assaulted by nameless demons that couldn't be disarmed. She drank, but drinking only worsened her wretchedness. At the time I knew nothing of the reasons for her suffering, the abandonments and traumas of death and madness she had endured in childhood and that haunted her still. And I was filled with admiration for her ability to slough off the pain that sometimes trapped her, and become her more familiar self, cheerfully blowing bubbles, patiently reworking a poem, wasting a few dollars on slow-stepping nags like Flying Dolphin and Speed of Light.

When the month at Yaddo came to an end, I went back to my job in New York and Elizabeth moved on to Washington, where she was succeeding Robert Lowell for a year, as Poetry Consultant at the Library of Congress. Occasionally I'd receive a handwritten letter that often required a magnifying glass to decipher, and was well worth the eye strain. (Elizabeth's handwriting was daunting, but as I later discov-

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ered, her typewriting was almost as hard to make out, filled as it was with dashes, like the poems of Emily Dickinson.) She was a marvelous letter-writer, the words flowing from her fingers with an uninhibited spontaneity so very different from the reticence and restraint of her poems and stories. Far from prolific in her published work, she poured her days into thousands of letters with unstinting vitality and ease. She could evoke the atmosphere of her palatial office in the Library of Congress in a few tossed-off phrases (her secretary, she wrote, "handles me very gently and just suggests one little chore at a time, and serves sherry to callers, etc.") and her image of Washington has a ghostly exactness:

> Washington doesn't seem quite real – all those piles of granite and marble – like an inflated copy of another capital city someplace else (the Forum?) – even the Lincoln Memorial, which I went to see, affected me that way.

At the end of her year as Poetry Consultant she returned to New York and her tiny apartment on King Street, on the fringe of Greenwich Village, but as always the city soon exacerbated her irrepressible restlessness, her passionate need to travel, driven to be on the move even when she could not find the answer to her "questions of travel":

> What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life
> in our bodies, we are determined to rush
> to see the sun the other way around? . . .
>
> *"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come*
> *to imagined places, not just stay at home?*
> *Or could Pascal have been not entirely right*
> *about just sitting quietly in one's room?*
>
> *Continent, city, country, society:*
> *the choice is never wide and never free.*
> *And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,*
> *wherever that may be?"*

As a child Elizabeth had been shuttled by grandparents and aunts between Nova Scotia, Worcester, and Boston. As a young woman she wandered, of her own volition, between Europe and New York and Key West, where she settled for several years during the war. In 1951, having published a highly praised book, *North & South*, she was awarded a generous fellowship by Bryn Mawr College, and embarked on her

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most ambitious journey. Elizabeth booked passage on a freighter that would take her down the eastern coast of South America, around the Horn, and then northward along the western coast, with stops in Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and – the place she most eagerly longed to visit – Tierra del Fuego. She planned to write a prose account of this long and arduous voyage – though secretly, as she wrote me half-seriously, she wished she could just spend all the fellowship money on a pair of diamond earrings, which she considered a much better investment for the future than anything she might eventually write.

I had been living in Rio for the better part of a year when Elizabeth's freighter docked in the Brazilian port of Santos. She had planned two brief visits while the ship remained in port – one with me in Ipanema, the other with a Brazilian friend, Lota de Macedo Soares, she had known in New York during the war. But the freighter left for Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and the Straits of Magellan without Elizabeth, because her "brief" stopover in Brazil lasted for more than fifteen years. The immediate reason for this drastic change of plan was Elizabeth's violent allergic reaction to the fruit of the cashew tree several days after she arrived in Rio. She felt as though she'd been poisoned, and the asthma that had plagued her since childhood joined the attack. By the time Elizabeth recovered, two weeks later, Lota, with whom she'd been staying in Rio, had persuaded Elizabeth to abandon the voyage round the Horn and remain in Brazil.

In the mountains of Petropolis, some sixty miles from Rio – it had been the summer residence of the Brazilian emperors – Lota owned a large tract of land, a *fazenda* called Samambaia, where she was building a house that would embody her passionate ideas about modern architecture and design. Like many upper-class Brazilian women of her generation, Lota had never been to university. But though she had no formal training in architecture, she had read widely and been an enthusiastic observer of the modernist buildings created by renowned Brazilian architects like Oscar Niemeyer, who some years later would create the moonscape of Brasilia. A gifted and knowledgeable amateur of modern design, Lota came from a wealthy family that traced its Brazilian roots back to the Portuguese settlers of the sixteenth century. But she had long been estranged from her eccentric father, who owned the *Diario Carioca*, one of the largest newspapers in Rio. Warm and lively, brimming with tempestuous energy, Lota believed that in Brazil she could provide Elizabeth with the stable tranquility and domestic peace she needed for her work and well-being. They would live in the half-finished house in Samambaia, but Lota also had a pied-à-terre in the Leme section of Rio, overlooking Copacabana Beach and the magnificent bay, tors thrusting

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out of the water like a giant's stony fingers, which the first Portugese explorers had mistaken for a great river, the River of January.

When Elizabeth told me she was going to stay in Brazil, I was puzzled and more than a little apprehensive. For the better part of a year I had been living in Brazil with my then husband, and I longed to get away from the suffocating heat, the bad food, the untamable ants parading incessantly through our kitchen, the ubiquitous lassitude and incompetence, the unsettling sense of a world falling apart.

I did not find Rio exotic, I could not lose myself in the seductive, tattered beauty of the city, as some of my American friends were able to do. During the four convulsive days of Carnival, the entire country goes berserk, and the very air turns loud and wild. (The Brazilian addiction to noise did not subside on Ash Wednesday, when radios and voices were pitched, as always, at top volume. Even the animals in Brazil can't stand quiet, like the parrot we boarded during a friend's absence. It was unnerved by the comparative silence of our apartment, and screamed "Socorro! Socorro!") I soon found the unceasing racket unbearable – the pounding beat of orgiastic delirium, the deafening day-long night-long commotion, the samba-ing crowds in the streets – and fled to our apartment in Ipanema, where I reached for the most northernly book I could find – Harold Nicolson's *Some People* – seeking relief in his cool British prose from the wild clamor outside. I was clearly in the grip of something Elizabeth described in a letter not long after she settled in her new home: "I think I carry some awful notions from the North with me, like a sledge loaded with weapons and pemmican. . . ."

It wasn't just my own disaffection with Brazil that made Elizabeth's decision to live there seem risky. At times during my occasional visits to Samambaia, Elizabeth appeared to me as fragile as one of the soap-bubbles she had blown at Yaddo. She knew hardly anything about this immense country, yet at the age of forty she was committing herself to a foreignness more complex than even this experienced traveler had ever known. Would she be able to find the asthma medicine she couldn't live without? Learn Portuguese, a language that confounded me? And wouldn't the modest income she had inherited from her father's family be frighteningly inadequate against a rate of inflation that galloped more wildly out of control every day?

For a while she did indeed prove allergic to every plant and tree in that lush and alien landscape, but eventually Dona Elizabetchy – as Lota's servants pronounced her name – became far less vulnerable to many dangers, within and without, and her life in Brazil turned out to be the happiest time she had yet known. In "Arrival at Santos," one of the earliest poems that drew upon her new sense of place, she mocked the

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exorbitant expectations with which she had begun the journey to South America, but in a way they did all come true: "Oh, tourist / is this how this country is going to answer you / and your immodest demands for a different world, / and a better life, and complete comprehension / of both at last. . . ." No longer a tourist, her "immodest" demands *were* met. For Lota – shrewd and generous and wise, full of strong and irrepressible opinions about everything – had realized that what Elizabeth needed, for her health and her sanity and her writing, was not all those lonely weeks on a freighter, or the fragmenting jangle and clang of New York, but the affectionate protection of a home, a sense of belonging, the orderly consolations of habit and dailiness, the will to stay put. They became lovers, even if Lota more often acted the mother to Elizabeth the child.

I returned to New York a few months after Elizabeth settled down in Samambaia, feeling no *saudades* for Brazil. (*Saudades* has no English equivalent; the word mingles feelings of homesickness, nostalgia, longing for a cherished place, for the friends we miss, and so on.) It was then that our friendship came to rely, over the huge distance of seven thousand miles, on the many letters we exchanged regularly for more than ten years. Happy as she was in Brazil, Elizabeth still needed to maintain her ties with her own country, and she depended greatly on letters in answer to her own, from Robert Lowell, Marianne Moore, Randall Jarrell, and many others.

I eagerly looked forward to the arrival every few months (and sometimes more often) of her wonderfully casual and funny letters, so unlike her coolly laconic poems. They arrived in flimsy airmail envelopes, with a striped border of green and yellow (the national colors of Brazil) – several pieces of cheap airmail stationery ("so thin," Elizabeth once wrote, "it wrinkles like sheets") almost completely covered with single-spaced typing and dozens of afterthoughts in her maddening scrawl.

A letter from Elizabeth was a free-associating potpourri of domestic details, literary gossip and judgment, politics, landscape, lamentation, weather, and joy – the joy she felt at no longer being alone, of living contentedly in a house alive with noisy, succouring normality. Nor was her life on the mountain as isolated and unchanging as I had feared it might be. Lota, ever gregarious, had a horde of friends who came to visit, bringing their eccentricities with them, like the "zoo lady" who borrowed Lota's jeep one day to transport a load of parrots. Elizabeth was enraptured, and described it all in her next letter:

> She had to ship off dozens somewhere or other – so picked all those who use the filthiest language to get rid of them. . . . She also has a

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> baby lion that just flew in from Pretoria the other day – 4 months old and absolutely adorable. He stands on the sofa on his hind legs watching for her out the window – sleeps with her and tears the sheets to shreds, of course. . . . And he lies at night gazing into the open fire like a baby King of the Jungle.

The fierce, unblinking eye she used with such tactile precision in her poetry feasted on the strange and exasperating variousness of her new home, and as Elizabeth's Portuguese improved – she was far more responsive to the language than I had been – her reports on Samambaia and the occasional trips to Rio grew more confident and evocative with every letter. A few months after she moved to Samambaia, she could scarcely contain her gratitude when Lota arranged to have a studio built for Elizabeth, not far from the main house, but far enough away for her to escape the daily tumult of servants and workmen. The studio was perched above a waterfall, and its sound did not disturb the poet in this private place where she could work in quiet peace.

"I am so overcome I dream about it every night," she wrote me in October of 1952:

> [My studio] has whitewashed walls and a herringbone brick floor, and a small fireplace of a rock Lota found here, dark gray with mica flecks, very pretty – also a small bathroom and kitchenette to make tea, etc. I'm sure I'll just sit in it weeping with joy for weeks and not write a line.

She was relentlessly clawed by guilt for the too small number of poems and stories she was able to finish, and thought worthy of publication. (When she came to Brazil, Elizabeth had published only one book of poems – *North & South* – at the age of thirty-five.) In letter after letter she lamented her inability to write rapidly and freely, with the confident, prolific industriousness of her college friend Mary McCarthy, and she scolded herself mercilessly. After reading a long article about Italy that Mary McCarthy had published in *The New Yorker*, Elizabeth confessed, "I am childishly envious of [Mary's] ability to write that kind of thing. Oh, how I wish I could. . . . What I envy is her *quantity* more than anything – but poetry can't be done that way, I suppose, and I approach everything, even stories, in the same desultory and emotional way, and it doesn't work very well." In turn, Mary McCarthy once admitted, "I envy the mind hiding in [Elizabeth Bishop's] words, like an 'I' counting up to a hundred and waiting to be found." Given their very

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dissimilar temperaments and talents, there was clearly no way, ever, that their envy could be assuaged.

It wasn't just Elizabeth's "indolence" – her self-berating word – that accounted for the meager literary yield. Though she had the studio to escape to, everyday life in Brazil, even for the efficient Lota, could be an exasperating, time-devouring struggle: with the climate, the lunatic inflation, incompetent workmen who resisted any new and better way of doing anything. Since Lota's house was still a-building, without a telephone or electricity, when Elizabeth came to stay, there were many practical reasons for putting off further work on an unfinished poem or story. There was, for example, the American-type stove that Lota craved for heating the living room:

> We cut pictures out of magazines and had the iron-worker make us what is really nothing but an ordinary sheet-iron stove, oval, rather like a cake of soap on legs, with stove pipe. But since they have never used anything like that here before, it is creating quite a sensation: he swears it will never work, and every inch of it has been a battle-ground and he and Lota have screamed their heads off at each other - worse scenes than usual, because carried on in the shop with twenty men hammering iron and working buzz-saws and blast furnaces, etc., all around us. . . . I don't know whether it's admirable or not to have absolutely no sense of comfort like the Brazilians.

Despite such commotion, this strange country did provide Elizabeth with the calm security of a home, and it was this stability that enabled her to tap ineradicable memories of childhood in ways she had not attempted before. As John Unterecker has remarked, in Brazil "she [was] freed by her foreignness to be most like herself," and for the first time she could directly confront in her writing the confusion and sense of abandonment she had felt as a child about her mother's insanity.

Elizabeth's father had died when she was eight months old, and the young widow never recovered from the shock of her husband's premature death. Gertrude Bishop returned with her infant daughter to her parents' home in rural Nova Scotia, where her condition steadily deteriorated, until, when Elizabeth was five, her mother was confined to an asylum for the remaining eighteen years of her life. As Elizabeth summoned up that tragic finality in the story, "In the Village," which she wrote in Samambaia, the recollection begins with "A scream, the echo of a scream" that hangs over the village. Like Caliban's isle, the story is "full of noises," as the child tries to muffle her pain by visiting the blacksmith's shop ("Clang. / *Clang* . . . / It sounds like a bell buoy out at sea.

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/ It is the elements speaking: earth, air, fire, water") and by driving the family cow, Nelly, to pasture ("Whack! . . . Flop, flop") and listening to the river gurgling *"Slp."*

In an age when poets feel compelled to confess even sins they have not committed, Elizabeth's resistance to the personal in her work is all the more remarkable. But while she allowed herself in this story to write with rare candor about the disruptions and losses of her childhood, she remained uneasy about "In the Village." When the story, really a prose-poem, was published in *The New Yorker*, in 1953, she rejoiced at the money (lavish, compared to the mingy checks she was accustomed to getting from little magazines), but could not stifle her grave uncertainty: "I am feeling fearfully rich . . . and of course having fearful doubts about whether I should ever have written 'In the Village' at all or not, or if I did write it if it is the slightest bit of value to the English language."

Elizabeth was a consummate perfectionist. Just as she could be cuttingly harsh about work by other writers that failed to measure up to her exacting standards, she was no less hard on herself. It was this uncompromising severity, more than anything else, that prohibited her from sending out any poem or story she felt to be even slightly flawed – or "awful," a favorite word. But she knew that what she facetiously referred to as the "Flaubert stuff" – the obsessive pursuit of perfection – was the only way she could function as a writer. As she told me in one letter, when she felt the wolf was baying at the door, "I had a poem and a letter for Katherine [White, her editor at *The New Yorker*] – took them to the P. O. – changed my mind about one line in the poem and brought it back – now it's stuck for another five years, I suppose – and I'm desperate for CASH!" But when she did occasionally earn some real money, she was anything but sensible. Though she had never learned to drive a car, she spent the handsome check for "In the Village" on a little MG – bought, as she wrote, "for esthetic reasons," just the way she had placed her bets at the Saratoga racetrack. But the MG turned out to be one of the smartest investments Elizabeth ever made: in the days before Brazil developed its own automobile industry, cars were scarce and cost the earth. Several years after she bought her esthetic MG, she sold it for three times what she'd originally paid. Not so dumb about money after all.

Most of her years in Brazil, though, were plagued with anxieties about money, because Elizabeth's small inherited income couldn't begin to keep up with the chaotic inflation. (Lota had more land than readily available cash.) She had been spared the need of most postwar American poets to teach in order to survive, but Elizabeth was not the sort of purist who believes that writing-for-money is demeaning or corrupt. At

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this point, in the early 1950s, she could not count on a steady flow of fat checks from *The New Yorker*; not until years later did the magazine routinely accept everything she chose to submit.

In July of 1954, a project turned up that not only had the promise of real money for once, but also became a labor of love: the translation of an enchanting little Brazilian book called *Minha Vida de Menina* [*My Life as a Young Girl*]. As Elizabeth wrote in her introducton to *The Diary of Helena Morley*, as the American edition was called: "When I first came to Brazil . . . I asked my Brazilian friends which Brazilian books I should begin reading . . . [and] they frequently recommended this little book. Two or three even said it was the best thing that had appeared in Brazilian letters since Machado de Assis. . . . " The diary had been written, toward the end of the last century, by a half-English half-Brazilian girl of twelve growing up bright and mischievous in the mining town of Diamantina, in the state of Minas Geraes [General Mines].

Fired with enthusiasm, Elizabeth wrote me, as she embarked on the translation: "I am positive I have a publisher's dream . . . not their erotic best-seller dream, of course, but a real 'find' kind of dream." For the next three years, her letters were filled with the linguistic problems and the publishing mechanics of the translation, and they revealed a side of my friend I didn't know: the impractical artist – who couldn't balance her checkbook, and was in perpetual hot water with the Internal Revenue Service because her records were in a hopeless muddle – was suddenly, astoundingly, all business.

In her letters Elizabeth drew up lists of magazines that might be interested in excerpts from the diary, and she briskly devised ways of breaking her contract with her original publisher, Houghton Mifflin (which in any case turned the book down). She asked me to find a literary agent in New York who could at once appreciate the literary charm of *Minha Vida*, negotiate hard-headed financial terms about serial rights and royalty percentages, and somehow solve Elizabeth's money problems forever. When she was revved up by cortisone, which she occasionally had to take during very bad attacks of asthma, her energy and confidence ran high and free, and her hopes for the book soared like a kite. "I feel that 'M V de M' is sure-fire Book of the Month Club."

But the translation gave her endless headaches. It was not just the difficulty of converting one language into another (as Elizabeth pointed out in a letter, "Portuguese is much purer, heavier, and more formal than English," and she wanted the book to sound natural *in English*). She also had her hands full with Dona Alice, Senhora Brant, the young girl who had kept the diary more than sixty years before, and had become,

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through marriage, enormously rich. Neither Dona Alice, as vain as she was stubborn, nor her husband (a former head of the Bank of Brazil), nor their children gave a damn about the literary quality of the translation. They had naive and greedy fantasies of the money and fame the book would bring them, though they had more than enough of the former. And, adding to Elizabeth's problems, old Senhor Brant was extremely proud of his English, and insisted on going over every word of Elizabeth's text and making "corrections." At one point, she reported, "I had someone say 'Go home and sober up' (*curar se* – 'sober up' is right) and he changed it to 'Go home and dispatch your drunkenness.' "

When she had finished a large chunk of the translation, Elizabeth had a devil of a time finding a competent typist with good – or at least good enough – English, and the one she finally obtained, from the American Embassy, was barely adequate. And that wasn't all: one day, as Elizabeth was sorting the several carbon copies in her studio:

> Tobias, the cat, wandered in – it's a rainy evening – all glistening with rain and jumped up on my work bench to investigate everything as he usually does. I wasn't paying attention, and then I heard a funny trickling sound . . . and when I yelled at him and dashed to investigate I found he had made a small but deep puddle right between the 2nd and 3rd carbons of M V de M – all laid out beautifully in a row . . . The corners are all wet and *stink* . . . . What on earth shall I do. . . . He has never, never done anything like that before – always the perfect gentleman.

Eventually the smell of cat-piss evaporated, and Elizabeth forgave Tobias, whom she dearly loved. He maneuvered his way into her poem "Electrical Storm" – she never tired of writing about the melodramatic mountain weather in Samambaia. When the storm in the poem struck, Tobias "jumped in the window, got in bed – / silent, his eyes bleached white, his fur on end." And as hail, "the biggest size of artificial pearls," pounded against the house, and the storm fused the wiring and knocked out the telephone, "The cat stayed in the warm sheets."

The poem, one of the Brazilian group she included in *Questions of Travel* (1965), was probably written some time after Tobias made his disgraceful puddle. While she was working on the translation, Elizabeth gave it all her energy and attention, and she began to realize, perhaps for the first time in her life, how lucky she had been in her writing life. *Minha Vida*, she remarked in a letter when the translation was almost finished, "has been good for me, to find out how most writers have to do their work – maybe I'll appreciate my free time a little more after

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this." In truth she had never worked so hard before, but she remained cheerful and optimistic even when *The New Yorker* showed no interest in publishing any part of the diary. With her new-found practicality – bolstered by Bernice Baumgarten, the agent I found for Elizabeth in New York, whose literary intelligence was impeccable – Elizabeth decided that she would give her next book of poems only to the publisher willing to take the diary. Her subsequent association with Farrar, Straus & Giroux proved to be the happiest of her professional life.

Not only did her labor on the translation give Elizabeth a sense of the way most writers "have to do their work," but it nourished her imaginative energy to an unprecedented extent, and her letters were joyously full of ideas and resolution. In January of 1955 she wrote that in snatches of time stolen from *Helena Morley*, "I've started a whole book, I think – small but a book – about my travels to & in Brazil . . . I think now is the time to do it, before I know too much and would feel I had to get 'serious,' also before things have stopped striking me as strange, which they're already beginning to do . . . [The first section] is rather hectic and surrealist and lots of fun to write. . . ."

Unhappily, the exciting promise of this book was not fulfilled, though six years later she did publish a small volume about Brazil for a Time-Life series, in which Elizabeth's voice could scarcely be heard. Whatever she did write of the hectic and surrealist book seems to have vanished and was not mentioned again in her letters. For whatever reason – failure of nerve, loss of enthusiasm, the unsleeping doubts of a perfectionist – she couldn't sustain the original idea, just as she had earlier run aground with a long piece about Cape Sable Island, off the coast of Nova Scotia. The island, and the thought of writing about it, had absorbed Elizabeth for years, for it was off Cape Sable Island that her great-grandfather Hutchinson had gone down with the sailing vessel he commanded. Though Katherine White was eager to have "Sable Island" for *The New Yorker* and kept asking about its progress, Elizabeth eventually abandoned the essay as a tangle of false starts, and did not look back.

In the spring of 1956, Elizabeth's second book, *Poems: North & South—A Cold Spring*, won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, and she reacted with characteristic misgivings: "I'm sure you know how embarrassed I feel about that Pulitzer, fun though it has been getting it. Never has so little work dragged in so many prizes . . . and I catechize myself minutely worrying about *why*." She sincerely felt that Randall Jarrell deserved the prize more than she did, but she couldn't help being amused and even a trifle impressed with the official American reaction in Rio: "Even the Embassy, our Embassy, rose to the occasion – all the way up the mountain, in a huge black station wagon; now they'll invite us to

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some movies, we hope. . . ."

But Elizabeth was still too deeply absorbed in the translation of *Minha Vida* to spend much time brooding about the Pulitzer. In April she flew in a tiny plane to Diamantina, and was delighted to find that it had changed remarkably little since Helena's girlhood. It moved her greatly, actually to behold the place, as she wrote in her introduction, where the events in the diary "*really happened*; everything did take place, day by day, minute by minute, once and only once, just the way Helena says it did," and, back in Samambaia, she wrote her account of the visit to Diamantina and her discovery of the book with unusual dispatch.

When *The Diary of Helena Morley* was finally published toward the end of 1957, the reviews were everything Elizabeth had hoped for, and she was particularly pleased by Marianne Moore's succinct praise in the magazine *Poetry*. But the sales and royalties (which she of course had to share with Bernice Baumgarten, the Brant family, the publisher, and the Internal Revenue Service) were a bitter disappointment. (In the long run, though, Elizabeth's three years of hard labor and exhausting negotiations *were* rewarded; the little book remained in print for years, and there were several paperback editions.) When the book came out in England in 1959, Elizabeth was elated by V. S. Pritchett's praise in *The New Statesman*, and hoped that the sales would be substantial. At the end of the year she received a royalty check from Gollancz for the equivalent of four dollars and ninety cents – as she ruefully commented in a letter, "That's even worse than poetry." She and Lota once again had to abandon their plans for a trip to Italy in the spring, and Elizabeth, desperate as ever for cash, began writing a detective story which, unsurprisingly, she tossed out after a chapter or two.

What proved a nagging frustration throughout Elizabeth's years in Brazil was the difficulty of importing things from the United States which couldn't be obtained in that backward country for love nor money. Lota was determined to have the furnishings in her house be of high order: *bom desenho*, well designed like the household objects displayed at the Museum of Modern Art. *Bom desenho* was less important to Elizabeth, who wrote, "I am urging Lota to read the Life of Gandhi to see if I can't gradually wean her away from the idea of worldly possessions, but so far no luck." But Elizabeth did find herself needing or craving things unknown in Brazil, and they couldn't just be ordered by mail from Bloomingdale's for one maddening reason – the Brazilian *alfandega*, or customs, a peculiar and capricious institution. Packages were routinely held at the customs house for months, and when they ran out

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of space they either returned them to the sender or exacted outrageous amounts of duty.

To get around this "trade barrier" – the *alfandega* maze of indifference, corruption, and incompetence – Lota and Elizabeth had to depend on the kindness of friends returning to Rio from visits in the north. Oddly, the customs agents were much less sticky about "accompanied baggage" than about packages arriving by mail. A number of Elizabeth's friends in New York, especially those like myself who knew how few of the comforts Americans take for granted could be found in Brazil, were at times deluged with shopping lists from Samambaia – everything from panty girdles (because the Brazilian kind, Elizabeth pointed out, "have more take than give") to phonograph records and window blinds. Because Elizabeth said she was better known in Brazil as a cook than a poet (she loved to serve American specialities like Apple Brown Betty to her Brazilian friends, who thought them exotic) she found it hard to manage without cake racks, cream of tartar, a doughnut cutter ("because it's an awful nuisance to use a glass and then another glass"), none of which had been heard of in Brazil. Once the motley assortment of shopping was delivered to the returning friend's hotel, we all held our breath, above and below the Equator, until the stuff had arrived safely in Samambaia. Elizabeth and Lota were always ecstatically grateful and sent wonderful presents in return: kilos of coffee that actually tasted as good as it smelled, *bombilhas* (silver straws for drinking maté tea, a speciality of the Brazilian south) and tiny silver spoons festooned with a plastic coffee bean.

Fortunately, books and magazines, for some mysterious reason, were deemed of no value by the customs, and could be mailed to Elizabeth with near-perfect confidence. One of the special pleasures of Elizabeth's letters was the running account of what she'd been reading, and the pointed freshness of her comments. She could be scathing about a bad or pretentious poem or novel, or a book she thought ludicrously overrated (E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, for one example), and she always had something original to say about writing she admired. When I sent her the English translation of *Doctor Zhivago* in 1959, she galloped through the book and wrote me immediately:

> I found it not a good novel but a marvelous book. Now I feel I *know* what it might have been like if I'd been born in Russia instead of Massachusetts. . . . After long gruelling days of fleeing, packing, etc. tipping the family out of the sledge into snowbanks 'for fun' – then taking baths and doing a big *washing*. *Then* sitting down to write poems the rest of the night. No doubt about it – they'll conquer the world all right if even the 'degenerate' poets

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have that much energy.

One winter when it rained with biblical constancy for days on end, she began reading Coleridge's letters and couldn't stop for the next six weeks, as she reported, going through everything of his she had on hand. During this interminable storm Elizabeth found herself alone in Samambaia for a few days – "alone" because Lota was away in Rio, but all the servants were about, "and the toucan, who has a sore foot, and the cat (who was being wormed) and the *roaring* waterfall – I feel as if I had undergone a sort of Robinson Crusoe Experience." Indeed, before Coleridge had swept everything else away, she had been looking at Defoe's novel (which she didn't much like). Though she did not write the great poem "Crusoe in England" until many years later, it is tempting to wonder if this was perhaps the moment when it began to take shape in her imagination. (She often began writing a poem and then, as she once remarked to an interviewer, it "just sat around"; in this case it may have "sat around" for ten years.)

Some reckless speculation: was Brazil a kind of Cruscoe-island for Elizabeth, the place where she had found refuge after too many shipwrecked years? Brazil, in its strangeness, its provincialism, its primitiveness? Did Cruscoe's meditation about his island, once he was back in England, begin with those rainy days of solitude in Samambaia? Was she remembering those torrents when Crusoe, in the poem, longingly recalls the distant barren island where he learned the brute lessons of survival – as Elizabeth had learned them in Brazil?

> My island seemed to be
> a sort of cloud-dump. All the hemisphere's
> left-over clouds arrived and hung
> above the craters – their parched throats
> were hot to touch.
>
> Was that why it rained so much?
> And why sometimes the whole place hissed?

Her letters were filled with the wildly operatic weather of the mountains, where the rain seemed more drenching and clamorous, more invasive than it was anywhere else.

One year Elizabeth was fascinated by a volume of selections from Virginia Woolf's diaries, and she ruminated in a long letter that Woolf

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had always "reminded me of some wonderful insect – with 'mosaic vision' like the eye of the bee – really a little inhuman . . . I don't believe anyone – or we – or Americans, maybe (and she seems to have disliked us) could ever be so purely 'literary' again. . . ." A week later, after finishing the volume, Elizabeth was less detached, thinking of her own "indolence": ". . . she is much more heroic than I had ever realized – and the amount of work she accomplishes fills me with despair, really. The amount of discipline is frightening – "

Elizabeth's reading in Brazil ranged far and wide: Lawrence's *Sea and Sardinia*, which she thought the best of his books; a biography of Melbourne; Ernest Jones's life of Freud; the journal Darwin kept on the *Beagle*, in which his complaints about Brazilian inefficiency and slovenliness amused her because things had changed so little since Darwin's day. She was outraged by a story of Salinger's in *The New Yorker*, "Seymour: An Introduction": "That horrible self-consciousness, every sentence commenting on itself and comments on itself commenting on itself, and I think it was actually supposed to be *funny*. And if [Seymour's] poems were supposed to be so good why not just give us one or two and shut up, for god's sake?"

And sometimes Elizabeth's reading proved useful in unsuspected ways. In a particularly endearing letter she wrote after coming down with conjunctivitis during a trip to Ouro Preto (where she later bought and restored an old house), she reported: "My eyes felt so horrible and I couldn't read or type for a few days and I kept feeling if only I could cry, I'd be all right. So finally I sat down and read 'Little Women' for about two hours and wept a great deal, as much as I always do at sentimentality, and my eyes immediately felt much better. . . ."

When I recalled how miserable Elizabeth could become at Yaddo and in New York, I rejoiced when she wrote, "It is a little hard to get used to being happy [she had begun writing "unh" and crossed it out] after forty-two years – birthday two days ago – of being almost consistently unhappy." The natural beauty of Samambaia, the engulfing lushness of the landscape, never ceased to captivate her, and the descriptive brilliance of her letters was a special delight. Writing one Fourth of July (she typed a rocket-burst of asterisks at the top of the page to celebrate the day), she recounted a recent adventure in Rio, when Lota drove a group of friends up the mountain called Corcovado (Hunchback) that towers over the bay, with its hundred-foot-tall figure of Christ the Redeemer on the summit. They had come to see the São Pedro fireworks, which, that year, it had been announced in the papers, would include a surprise. Even though the car was making ominous noises,

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> we were all determined to see these sky-rockets . . . so we kept right on. . . . From where we were, away up, [the fireworks] did look lovely – and were almost silent. The surprise seemed to be one phase of answering rockets set off right from Corcovado, over our heads – with Christ appearing very queerly through the smoke and smell of powder. But even queerer than the surprise was the fact that the sea, or what you could guess of it from a lighthouse or two and the lights of passing ships, seemed to be straight up in the air, very high – as if it were a sheet of carbon paper standing on edge –

Elizabeth's enchantment with the flamboyance of nature did not diminish her chronic sense that there was something terribly wrong with Brazil, politically, socially, morally. The word she used again and again to express her exasperation was "hopeless," and the longer she lived in her new-found land, the more accurate she felt that word to be. In the early winter of 1954, when Elizabeth and Lota once again had to cancel plans for a trip to Europe because they didn't have the money, Elizabeth's disappointment spilled over into a gloomy appraisal of the country's seemingly incurable problems. Now that she had to stay put and dig in her heels,

> it's suddenly made me realize I must take Brazil more seriously and really learn the god-damned language. . . . As a country I feel it's *hopeless* and just plain lethargic, self-seeking, half-smug, half-crazy, hopeless. The U. S. may be in a fearful moral mess right now, but I feel that what made it great was not geography (as the Brazilians say) but the enormous moral push behind it to begin with. There has never been one here, as far as I know – and there has never been a revolution, which every country needs, I shd. think – successful or unsuccessful – The few honest and intelligent men one hears about . . . seem to have been like comets – but so very few of them. I sometimes feel if I could only meet one man here who seemed really concerned and honest –

When Elizabeth arrived in Brazil the wily dictator Getulio Vargas, who had more political lives than a cat, was still President, and during the years she lived there, one would-be reformer after another would come into office with high hopes of cleaning out the Byzantine corruption and in some way lessening the enormous chasm between obscene wealth and miserable poverty. Eventually the reformers would give up in despair, overwhelmed by the insurmountable enormity of the problems they couldn't begin to solve, or outmaneuvered by the cunning of their

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enemies. Even so ambitious and high-minded a president as Juscelino Kubitschek, who initiated the large-scale industrialization of Brazil when he took office in 1953, nearly wrecked the already shaky economy by pushing through that grandiose monument to his ego, the new inland capital, Brasilia.

Even more than the political chaos and corruption and the general dilapidation of the country, what never ceased to shock Elizabeth was the contrast between the grandiose opulence of the white-rich life and the ignorance and destitution of the black poor who in Rio were concentrated mainly in the *favelas* (shantytowns), without water or electricity, that stood alongside the gleaming luxury of new apartment houses for the well-to-do. When Lota hired a new servant couple in 1960, Elizabeth described them with wonder and dismay:

> It is hard to realize the depths of ignorance and profundities of stupidities that exist in the interior, and not so far in, of this country. [The new couple] had never heard of the USA or England – or a king or queen, or Recife or Bahia – and they will eat almost nothing but cornmeal, beef and black beans, because they're AFRAID to. On the other hand, they both know how to handle guns.

In the finest of her poems about Brazil, "Manuelzinho," she balanced with great subtlety the annoyance it was impossible not to feel toward illiterate blacks like the couple and the gardener of the poem, and the forgiveness it was equally hard not to extend. In the many-layered poem about Manuelzinho, "the world's worst gardener since Cain," Elizabeth captured the voice and temperament of Lota de Macedo Soares with uncanny perfection: crackling with irritation and anger, affectionate, wheedling, bullying, at once amused and charmed and furious when her impossible gardener comes to settle:

> what we call our "accounts,"
> with two old copybooks,,
> one with flowers on the cover,
> the other with a camel.
> Immediate confusion.
> You've left out the decimal points.
> Your columns stagger,
> honeycombed with zeros.
> You whisper conspiratorially;
> the numbers mount to millions.
> Account books? They are Dream Books.

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> In the kitchen we dream together
> how the meek shall inherit the earth –
> or several acres of mine.

Adorably feckless, deliriously incompetent, Manuelzinho and his family made Elizabeth feel "as if I were living in the 19th century – it's hard to make the country seem real or contemporary."

Though she never ceased to scold herself for writing so little, Elizabeth oscillated between a confident sense of her achievement and the contradictory tremor that everything she had done was worthless. One year she was intensely irritated when *Vogue* published an article about her, riddled with slick ignorance about the nature of her poetry. When that issue of the magazine finally reached her, she lamented: "Oh dear I hate that picture of myself . . . and that insistence on my coldness and precision, etc. – I think that's some sort of cliché always used of women poets, at least I didn't *feel* as if I wrote that way." Time and again critics and journalists attended only to the surface of her descriptive imagery, and failed to hear the undertones of pain and desperation, the lonely urgency behind the perfectly poised control and the mask of detachment. Elizabeth knew better than most how easily her precarious contentment, even in Brazil, could be threatened.

It was in part this self-knowledge that caused her to grieve so deeply when she heard that Dylan Thomas had died in New York in 1953. Elizabeth sorrowed not only for a poet who died so recklessly young but for all poets, herself among them, who lived too close to the knife-edge of self-destruction. In her letter about Thomas she wondered, "Why do some poets manage to get by and live to be malicious old bores like Frost or – probably – pompous old ones, like Yeats, or crazy old ones like Pound – and some just don't?" Though her work had scarcely anything in common with the poetry of Dylan Thomas, she remembered, mourning him, the "instantaneous sympathy and pity" she had felt on meeting him in New York, for she believed that "he made most of our contemporaries seem small and disgustingly self-seeking and cautious and hypocritical and cold. . . ."

A few weeks later, still unable to shake off her sadness about Thomas, she allowed herself a rare outburst of mordant candor: "Poets should have self-doubt left out of their systems completely – as one can see most of the surviving ones have. . . . And of course it isn't just poets – we're all wretched and half the time or three-quarters I think it is a thoroughly disgusting world – and then the horror vanishes for a while, mercifully. But in my own minor way I know enough about drink-and-

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destruction." I was upset by this letter; never before had Elizabeth written, at least to me, with such naked despondency. Nor did she ever strike so bleak a note again. But the death of Dylan Thomas had inflamed a nerve that could not for a time be stilled.

Despite all the prizes and the praise, the joy of her life with Lota, the crippling self-doubt never ceased to gnaw at Elizabeth. When Philip Rahv warned her in a letter from New York that a hostile review of *A Cold Spring* would appear in the next issue of *Partisan Review*, she squirmed with anxiety: "I am steeling myself, but feeling pretty low about my own work at the moment. I've never minded criticism a bit, strange to say – but what if this reviewer [Rahv had not divulged the name] says the TRUTH? – does point out the awful faults I know are there all right? I've been just too lucky and spoiled, I know." Dona Elizabetchy was not indulging in false modesty; her insecurity was a constant, a burden she could not dislodge.

In the late 1950s her habitual self-reproach – for earning so little, letting too many poems and stories die on the vine – intensified, because Lota was having severe financial problems of her own at the time. Of course Elizabeth knew perfectly well that most writers at times experience the dismaying collapse of work begun with high hopes and the best of intentions. But she was tortured by her inability to get anywhere with the story of Sable Island and the "surrealist" book about Brazil. With no real money coming in ("Oh for $1,000 and a day at Lord & Taylor's," she exclaimed more than once) and the royalities for *The Diary of Helena Morley* a crushing disappointment, she grew more and more depressed. "My own earning capacities seem to have gone to zero . . . right at the wrong time and I can't seem to finish a line of anything. But surely, surely it will come to an end soon. Only it's been awfully long and I seem to grow stupider and stupider all the time. . . . Maybe I'm suffering from simple going-to-pieces-in-the-tropics. . . ."

Then, early in 1961, the editors of the Time-Life "World Library Series" approached her about writing the text for a lavishly illustrated volume on Brazil, and Elizabeth felt it was a godsend. She was determined that just this once she would stifle the imperatives of perfection, stop fussing about the rightness of every word. After signing the contract, she was brimming with practicality:

> It will pay well, (by my standards) and also mean free trips around Brazil and [a] free trip to NY. . . . Around 35,000 words of text. Naturally very superficial, a little of everything – history, economics, geography, the arts, etc. – I really don't think it should be too hard to do. . . . However – one requirement is that I spend three weeks in NY 'rewriting' with them, and I know that will be hell. . . . However

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> – I am going to do it just as *fast* as I can, without letting myself brood about it too much, and my only goal will be to make it a little livelier and less cliché-ridden than the [other volumes in the series]. . . . I certainly have enough material, and Lota and I should get some fun out of putting in our favorite jokes and people. . . .

Almost from the start, however, Elizabeth found herself seriously at odds with the editors. A Time Inc. bigwig, who knew almost nothing about Brazil, made his way up the mountain to Petropolis to "instruct" Elizabeth about the way she ought to write the book and the attitudes she should express. Furious, she shot off a letter to me decrying:

> this awful optimism – this "up-beat," as he called it. . . . No one seems to see how damned condescending it is to think that Brazilians *like* 'crazy' people like Kubitschek – or that a little corruption – or a *lot* – is good for South American countries. . . . The real trouble is going to be in New York – when they present me with their 'up-beat' statistics to show that everything is wonderful and getting better and better, etc. . . . Maybe I can at least be *objective*, it will be no place to be critical, I know, but surely I don't have to say that Brasilia, for one example, is just absolutely perfect. . . . If only I don't end up writing the way they talk. . . .

No chance of that: even if she tried, and gritted her teeth in the effort, Elizabeth was absolutely incapable of writing like anyone but herself. It did seem to be the right time for her to be doing such a book – writing she needn't fuss over, be perfectly business-like about, "just write as fast as possible and try not to think about it. No use the Flaubert-stuff (though I CAN'T seem to compose any other way)".

The time was right not only because Elizabeth badly needed the money but because Lota's talents had at last been recognized and put to serious use. Carlos Lacerda, an old and close friend of Lota's and the only Brazilian politician Elizabeth had any use for, had just been elected governor of Guanabara State, whose capital is Rio de Janeiro, and he had persuaded Lota to take on the enormous job of planning and supervising a vast urban-renewal project along the waterfront. Despite her lack of formal training, she had been reading and thinking for years about the ideal cities conceived by such architects as Le Corbusier. Even more important, she had a formidable gift for organization. She would need every bit of it, for the challenge was enormous: transforming a neglected part of Rio into a huge park with cafés and gardens, museums and promenades and playgrounds. Moreover, Lacerda's choice of a woman

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to direct this project was breathtaking in its audacity, because Brazilian men – not only the construction workers but the self-important pack of bureaucrats, engineers, landscape experts, architects, and politicians involved in the park – had never, ever taken orders from a woman.

For a while at least, it looked as though all those Brazilian peacocks had somehow managed to accept such an unheard-of division of authority, and Elizabeth approvingly reported that "Lota has been admirable, clear, succinct, quiet – directives like Napoleon's." It made Elizabeth very proud to know that at last her friend was "using her brains and helping poor dirty dying Rio at the same time."

But she took no pride in her own work as she slogged through the Time-Life book, which was proving more of a headache and frustration than she had anticipated. It saddened me to hear that she was having "a *hideous* time writing the thing," but this was hardly surprising. It wasn't only that she had neither the experience nor the ability to grind out the sort of briskly informative journalistic prose the editors wanted. From their castle keep in Rockefeller Center the editors endlessly pestered and offended and infuriated Elizabeth. The worst of it was that:

> like publishers, they keep paying lip-service to "distinguished writing," "your own opinions," "your fine reputation," and blah blah blah – *lying* like RUGS. . . . They are INCREDIBLE, that's all – it is really more like manufacturing whipped cream out of the by-products of a plastic factory than anything remotely connected with writing. . . . They also Tel-x-ed from NY to ask if I'd ever been a Communist. (Probably some infant editor saw a poem in *Partisan Review* and the name terrified them.)

Toward the end of October, 1961, Elizabeth and Lota, who had been laboring day and night on the park and badly needed a change, flew up to New York for Elizabeth's final tug-of-war with the editors. They were both exhausted, not only by work. Earlier that month, a violent political crisis in Brazil had been precipitated by the new president, Janio Quadros, when he gave a medal to Ché Guevara. For a while the country seemed to be on the verge of catastrophic breakdown, and unpolitical Elizabeth was being hotly pursued by magazines like *Encounter* and *The Atlantic Monthly* for her on-the-spot analysis of the crisis. During the uproar she confessed in a letter that her main feeling about all the commotion was simple: the country was just plain crazy.

Though drawn and travel-weary when they arrived in New York, Elizabeth and Lota were overjoyed to be there, to see their friends and

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scour the city for all the things they longed to take back. I had married again in the previous year, and for the baby I was expecting in December, they brought elegant sets of infant clothing – one for a boy, one for a girl, tiny pink dresses with elaborate smocking and beautifully tailored blue trousers and jackets. When my son was born, I put away the pink treasures, and have them still, waiting for a granddaughter – whose parents will need an exceptionally good laundress to care for them.

When *Brazil* was published in March of the following year, Elizabeth, back in Samambaia and still licking her wounds, wrote a letter sizzling with rage and chagrin:

> I hope you have not had time to read it, and never will have time. . . We [Elizabeth and the editors] ended up with a horrid exchange of letters – I lost my temper (if I'd done that the very first day maybe things would have been better) and now I am horribly and idiotically distressed by the book – absolutely everything seems wrong. . . .

She was especially incensed by the photographs the editors had chosen, or rather, by those they had left out: "not a single bird, beast or flower – in Brazil!" Nor did the text have even "a *trace* of what I tried to say." She was right: the book gave little sign of Elizabeth's literary imagination, and as she summed up the whole sorry business in a letter: "What they wanted to do – and have just about succeeded – was give their own vague preconception of an imaginary Brazil. . . . Please pretend I had nothing to do with it."

She got the nine thousand dollars Time-Life had agreed to pay, more than she had ever earned in a single year (not counting grants and fellowships and prizes), and Elizabeth and Lota were at last able to treat themselves to a brief holiday in Italy. It was not the leisurely rediscovery of Europe they had looked forward to, and endlessly postponed, but it was better than nothing. And the money Elizabeth had so painfully earned for a book she ended up detesting also made it possible for her, several years later, to buy a neglected colonial house in the baroque city of Ouro Preto. Built in the 1690s, the house was lovingly restored, at great cost, under Elizabeth's guidance, and she named it Casa Mariana, for Marianne Moore.

Over the years, reading and savoring Elizabeth's ebullient letters from Brazil, I had no reason to doubt that the contentment and rootedness that Lota had provided with such loving devotion would last forever. I could see the two women growing old together on the

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mountaintop in Petropolis, friends more than lovers, happy in their work, their cozy domesticity, their affection and respect for each other. But it was not to be.

Though the park that Lota had envisioned and zealously brought into being was a great personal triumph, the strain of coping with devious bureaucrats and temperamental engineers and landscape architects took a fearful toll. Ground down by the unrelenting pressure, Lota became ill, body and soul. The high-spirited and vibrantly cheerful woman I remembered so fondly shrank into darkness. Suspicious and hostile, she poisoned the snug world she had created for herself and Elizabeth with uncontrollable and groundless accusations of betrayal and abandonment.

When Elizabeth could endure it no longer, she flew north late in the summer of 1967 – it was rainy winter in Brazil – to stay with friends in New York. She badly needed the time and the distance away from the distrust and turmoil in Samambaia. Lota followed, though Elizabeth had begged her not to, and in the friends' apartment she committed suicide.

Though Elizabeth did stay in the house in Ouro Preto for brief periods after1967, Brazil without Lota could never again be a haven and a home. It was not only Lota's tragically vengeful act of desperation that destroyed the life in which Elizabeth had flourished for fifteen years, but her Brazilian friends turned against her as well, blaming her for Lota's death.

In the early seventies she left the country for good. But it held her imagination fast, with the insistent anchor of memory, in the Brazilian poems – "Santarem" and "Pink Dog" – that she wrote in her final decade, and in the disturbing elegy, "One Art," whose mock-jaunty refrain ("The art of losing isn't hard to master") ironically intensifies the poem's bitter denial of continuity and hope.

Saudades, Dona Elizabetchy. *Saudades*, Brazil.

Toni Greenberg
1925 – 1990

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JUAN GOYTISOLO

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

"The city rules over vast territories and fertile lands, is brimming with inhabitants and can be proud of its beauty and splendor. A meeting-point for travelers and itinerants, a place for weak and strong, where you can take your pick of men who are foolish and wise, serious or light-hearted, complaisant or stupid, humble or noble, blue-blooded or plebeian, unknown or famous. Its citizens pound back and forth like the waves of the sea, hardly fit into its seemingly narrow confines, though they are broad and capacious. It enjoys eternal youth and is ever watched over by the star of good fortune."

-Ibn Battuta, *Description of Cairo*

With a look like that of the scrawny, furless, grimy, whimpering cat, abandoned in the gutter amid the rapid procession of legs and the deafening noise of traffic – whose squalid corpse we shall fatally stumble across hours or days later, the victim of some vehicle's brutal power or of a more insidious form of urban aggression – from his precarious perch on the inhospitable road island of pavement slabs and stones, alone in the flux of implacable chaos, the old man's hazy, almost veiled gaze runs over the metal walkways packed with people, the human tide rushing to attack the buses, the pedestrian army confronting the din of screeching engines, the incessant bustle of an entire people that, with efficient economy of movement, takes advantage of the scarce space conceded to bodies to rush frantically after the usual places of rest or activity, calculating perhaps like the abandoned animal, through bleary eyes and shadows, the reprieve it greedily enjoys, the breathing space destiny has granted to its precarious existence in an agglomeration where sidewalks have disappeared, the ground is crumbling everywhere, drivers respect neither lights nor policeman's whistle, a megalopolis cruel to the infirm and the aged; a city without pity, master, his eyes tell me, eyes now blurred as they meet with the insistence of mine; merciless, that's right, *bidun rahma*.

Why did I communicate for a few moments in silence with that old man, that particular old man before plunging in turn into the river of cars and selfishly abandoning him to his uncomfortable refuge? It all

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began a few hours before: the airplane has flown over the island of Crete and is heading south, towards the Egyptian coast. From my window in the no-smoking area I have spotted God the Father indolently stretching out on the cottony eiderdown of a cloud: He seems in a good mood, is having fun with his cherubims and graciously points the pilot in the right direction like some mischievous, bantering car-park attendant who has just pocketed his tip, straight on, keep straight on. By nightfall I am in Midan al Tahrir: the taxi drove across the huge residential areas of Heliopolis and Masar al Guedid, headed up the avenue separating the university mosque of Al Azhar and the famous Khan al Khalili and, from the loathsome motorway raised up on two levels in a futile attempt to ease the traffic flow, I fleetingly contemplate, as in a slide-show, the unmeasurable sprawl of the catastrophe below hidden by the advertising hoardings for Coca-Cola, Seven-Up and Marlboro: decrepit housing, buildings walking a tightrope, balconies on the point of collapse, domes held up by a miracle, dust, dirt, poverty, clothes spread out to dry, children hanging out of windows, faded publicity posters, terraces covered in shacks, chicken-runs, rubbish, pigeon lofts, aerials, herds of goats.

Violent images of a city's distorted face with its wrinkles, cracks, scars, glazed eyes, bruises, sores, black eyes, sticking-plasters, patches, broken teeth, dislocated jaws, whilst my taxi drives towards the Ezbekiya gardens, above Midan al Ataba, between buildings whose splendor has faded and worn. The turrets and balustrades of a rococo edifice seem to have softened and melted like icing! On the dome of the old Tiring department stores four titans effortlessly hold aloft a glass terrestrial globe which has shed panes of glass like withered petals!

The airborne motorway has finally turned into the hurly-burly where bumper-to-bumper, hundreds of vehicles give vent to their owners' impatience with piercing blasts on the hooter. Pedestrians apparently accept the situation, too exhausted and weak to rebel against the perennial acoustic assault, the violence of traffic in a state of shock. If Sir Richard Burton observed a century and a half ago that the lively gestures and exchanges of the people of Cairo might lead a foreigner to the mistaken belief that they were always within an ace of coming to blows, nowadays gesticulating is a necessity imposed by the unbridled ferocity of the traffic. The traveler who assails a taxi-driver, clings to his window, demands the presence of a policeman, challenges the edgy bustle of the crowd, insists on an on-the-spot fine for the man who, he maintains, has insulted him, mimes a silent scene, shut out by the din and uproar. We must get on!

The journey to the hotel takes on oneiric hues, is swathed in a cloud of fantasy. The multitude hanging on the doors of trams and buses

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reflects the frenetic growth of a city that in ten years has gone from seven to fourteen million souls. Meanwhile the excavations for the underground railway have opened up the monster's entrails, generating fractured drains and mephitic floods, intensifying the general, irremediable confusion. In the center drivers attack the crossroads like fairground dodge-'em cars. A tanned, weasel-faced policeman waves his puppet arms to no avail, tries to halt a powerful Mercedes that drives right around him transforming his frustrated attempt at interception into a tardy, reluctant gesture of authorization. My taxi has stopped next to him and I observe at leisure his threadbare uniform and bulging crotch, his would-be air of authority, the cynical expression of an impotent ruler over chaos. The human bunches hanging from the carriages of the Helwan train have crashed into those coming from the opposite direction: six dead! Not a single building in Cairo has fallen down this week though fifty percent of them are in a state of ruin. But the city is still not Calcutta, the rats have not *yet* invaded the houses, beggars and cripples do not *yet* display their horrible stumps in hotel entrances, nor are they whipped out of sight by uniformed porters, the people are not *yet* dying on the sidewalks, walking skeletons do not *yet* proffer their lifeless hands or force the foreigner afraid of treading on them to jump to one side. My arrival at the hotel where I am to stay was merely an interlude in this initial vision of Al Qahira – literally, *The Victorious* – into whose omnivorous, emetic belly, I shall stride minutes later. The city that absorbs me is the ubiquitous, unleashed monster described by Edward Jarret in his excellent novel. For a few hours my gaze will be that of the old man sheltering on the traffic island: the disillusioned lucidity of someone who knows his sentence and is calculating the time left before he is blotted out.

In those ineffable Egyptian television serials, destined to stifle and dull the intelligence and sensitivity of Arab peoples, the directors carefully fashion the ideal ambience in which the plot will unravel: enormous apartments, modern offices and shops, peaceful gardens and walks the silence of which will be broken at most by whispering couples or soothing bird trills. Ordinary people have been unceremoniously expelled from those empty, hermetic spaces. Nothing indicates the proliferating human warren of the city: just shots of a deceptively clean river, private parks, avenues as bourgeois and exquisite as the characters' cars and houses. A utopia, drug, fantasy, a need to compensate for the cramped, promiscuous life of millions of people condemned to overcrowding in their lives as well as in the street? Do these women, men, children, old people who buy, sell, beg, work, eat and sleep on packed pavements nourish their dreams of a better life on the vision of those spacious rooms with showy

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furniture covered in grotesque fabrics whereon the dolls of the day strive to prove to them "that the rich also cry" with grimaces and mimicry that would make the worst provincial actor in Spain blush with shame. I decided to walk in the opposite direction along the Al Azhar avenue where I drove by taxi the previous evening, and followed the capricious inspiration of my footsteps along the sidestreets of Al Ghuriya, on the way to Khan al Khalili. The television counterpoint to the urban mass through which I cut a path, which I dodge as best I can, and which I inevitably knock and bump into, is suddenly sharply recalled, glaringly confirmed: a carpenter and two apprentices are putting the last touches to a paradigm of television furniture, one of those gilded armchairs, covered in plush or red velvet, with curved backs and huge seats, purpose-built, one could say, to greet stout bourgeois behinds, jubilant pontifical buttocks. As I turn my smitten gaze away from the purple throne I exultantly discover dozens of others lining up. The whole street is manufacturing tawdry furniture whose natural destination will be the lounges, repeatedly displayed on television, in the villas and apartments of the new class enriched by the *infitah!* On subsequent days, as I roam around the poor districts of Al Muski and Bab al Jal, on every corner I will come across new specimens of this armchair, whose unmistakable style I shall dub Louis XXVI to distinguish it from the other Louis: the beneficiaries of Sadat's unbridled opening-up of the economy would easily confuse the dynasties of Pharaohs with the list of our Gothic kings!

Hardly have I got over my discovery than I must step to one side to give way to a funeral cortège: the first of those I will have an opportunity to witness later during my stay in the City of the Dead. Friends and relatives of the deceased take turns to transport the coffin on their shoulders with a swaying, almost dance-like rhythm; at the rear women rigorously dressed in mourning also accompany the bier but without gesticulating or wailing. Minutes later, by the door to a mosque, I will come across another funeral retinue in which women mourners seem to rival and spur each other on to greater moaning and sobbing. I am now on the outskirts of Al Azhar and, through the pedestrian subway, I reach Khan al Khalili and the vast, well-tended esplanade next to the Hussein mosque. On the terrace of one of the cafés, from my seat amongst the *narghile* drinkers – in Egypt and Turkey, the same verb (*charab, icmek*) means both drinking and smoking – I can comfortably observe the spectacle of the multitude going in and out of the sanctuary, the door of which has been sheathed in a black canopy on the occasion of the celebration of *milad*.

The square has been closed to traffic and the parking of vehicles, but after a brief discussion and a tip to the wardens, some taxi drivers get

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the privilege of driving up and stopping next to the mosque. I notice straightaway that the passengers are newlyweds accompanied by a small number of friends and relatives. An old Cairo custom requires a ritual photo of the betrothed in the entrance to the Gaama Hussein. The girls, daubed with rouge, *khol* and lipstick look like models in Pronuptia sales items: skirts with long or half-length flounces, gauze headdresses, spotlessly white stockings and shoes. The men sport modest off-the-peg suits and clumsily fiddle with their bow-ties. Policemen, soldiers, passers-by tirelessly watch fresh taxis arrive, the toing and froing of the boys who open the car-door for the fiancée with her sprig of flowers, the groups of hired singers, the swarm of photographers ready to immortalize that moment of bliss. The small groups rapidly follow each other and the pretty, young bride can point a brief withering look of contempt at an elder, less well-endowed companion. The mosque porter – a young man in a white tunic, with black turban and beard – waits leaning on his broom-handle, next to the marble lobby where the betrothed must take their shoes off before visiting the temple. His mission is to clean the dust zealously from in front of the bride's feet in exchange for a tip. This labor, the exclusive rights to which he defends with might and main, obliges him to push the dirt from one corner of the doorway to another throughout the day as new candidates for a photo turn up, but – and this is vital – without ever removing it completely, as its existence is indispensable to the completion of his task. Broom in hand, he hurriedly sweeps the corner where the bride steps, energetically repelling the dust to the opposite side, and reverses the operation when the next group arrives. Thanks to a quantity of mobile if constant dust, the wily fellow never ceases to tuck away twenty-five or fifty *piastre* notes, perhaps even a pound, into the depths of his coat pocket with an expression of humble, entranced bliss. His presence in the midst of fiancés, relatives, morons and photographers, clasping his emblematic broom like some fairy-tail witch, turns him into a character in a comedy by the Quintero brothers or in *The Barber of Lavapiés*.

In any case, the spectacle of plebeian weddings in the Hussein mosque makes a pleasant contrast to the pompous *nouveau riche* ceremonies in the Hilton or Sheraton. As I had occasion to testify on a previous visit to Cairo, caricature there soars to unexpected heights, whilst never attaining the redeemable vulgarity of *kitsch*: the wedding cohorts process slowly to the light of fake beacons, applauded by a hired gang of waiters and lackeys; a film director shoots the different episodes of the festive event – the obligatory close-up of the bride's jewels – that will be shown later on video to visitors to the newlyweds' sitting room, furnished, of course, with Louis XXVI *fauteuils*. The pious, bearded sweeper

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would indeed introduce a bright splash of color. But the closed world of primates – refractory and hostile to contact with ordinary people – does not readily allow this kind of intrusion.

As I walk back to my hotel, along the crammed streets of Al Muski, I mull over the reasons for my already longstanding love of Cairo: unlike European or North American cities, where one grows old at life's edge, reduced to a robotic state with semi-atrophied feelings, a short stroll through the insect-like bustle in the center puts the traveler into immediate contact with the roots of life. Within a few hours I have seen dozens of weddings and two funeral cortèges! My sense of smell, blunted in cities subjected to anesthetizing asepsis, gradually comes back to life, aroused by the violence of the smells! No matter if the scent of flowers, spices or cedar wood mingles with that of excrement or rubbish. I am alive, I am walking around a *medina* where everything happens in the light of day and something is happening all the time. Is the degradation of the urban space – public works' trenches, aerial motorways, clapped-out yet overladen buses – just a mirage? As one of its recent visitors, Sami Nair, perceptively notes in *la Caire, la Victorieuse*, doesn't this apparent dislocation, self-destruction and decay perhaps constitute "a perpetual, cunning exercise in the redistribution" of its materials? Sinking down to get better foundations, falling apart to rise up, sucking up its detritus in order to devour even more. Doesn't Cairo, excessive and cruel, ragged and magnificent, feed, century after century, on the marrow of its children in a perennial, mocking exercise in self-consumption? I reread Ibn Battuta and his political diagnosis of the city: "The military tyrannize, the poor people suffer, but the powerful are not upset and the machine works as best it can." Is there a better way to sum up the history of the last fifty years? I have yet to climb the spiral staircase up Ibn Tulun's minaret to enjoy the perfection of a mosque which can only be compared in the elegant purity of its lines to the Kutubia in Marrakesh, yet the city has already reconquered me. Destroyed, ruined, burnt, tentacled Phoenix, *mantis religiosa*, Cairo seems to have discovered the secret of a continually renewed cycle which mingles life and death until they are fused.

If the cemetery is the city, as Larra said, we will have to go right to the heart of the macabre to explore its sources of life.

The same imprecision concerning the name of Egypt – known by its offspring both as Berr Masar and Bilad Masar – and its capital – called indistinctively Al Qahira or more simply, Masar – also surrounds the siting of the legendary City of the Dead. Whilst Burton situates it in the Bab Naser cemetery, my tourist guide locates it in Qait Bey and keenly advises against visiting for reasons of "decency." Cairo has in fact had for

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centuries four remarkable Muslim cemeteries as well as the Coptic cemeteries and a Jewish one: Bab Naser, Qait Bey, Bab al Wasir and Al Jalifa, or belonging to the imam Chaafai. The latter, equally dubbed the southern cemetery or Bab al Qarafa, has today more in common than the others with the features of a residential necropolis. Although I have leisurely trawled the mausolea, tombs and funeral pavilions of Bab Naser and Bab al Wasir, the number of Cairenes established there is relatively small and, in some areas of the latter, almost insignificant.

Qait Bey, famous for the splendid mosque to which it owes its name, is a special case. The population of the urban centers established in the macabre and the one which traditionally looked after the pantheons increased dramatically twenty years ago with the massive influx of refugees from the left bank of the Suez Canal, suffering at the time from merciless Israeli bombing raids. This usucapion, ratified by the impotence of the authorities, turned the cemetery into a city which presently boasts more than half a million inhabitants: with its mosques, schools, hospital, administrative buildings, markets, it constitutes an autonomous agglomeration whose precarious living conditions are expressed in a melancholy succession of images of overcrowding and poverty. In the square adjacent to the eponymous mosque – in a somewhat unreal setting of small stalls selling lupins and a ghostly, homemade roundabout – a handful of writers and artists whom I am unsure whether to describe as populist or *maudits* meets up in the afternoons in a café to inhale the smoke of *narghile* (*chicha*), fortified, to be true, with small cubes of hashish.

Qait Bey, or Northeastern Cemetery, in spite of the varied interesting aspects of its appeal to the curiosity of casual visitors – hundreds of mausolea, sometimes built with stones of the Pharaohs, raise to the purest November sky their wonderful smooth or fluted domes – resents the avalanche disintegrating its former social coherence and funereal traditions. The invasion of foreigners has been brutal and incapable of assimilation: the unclear frontier between the living and the dead has to a large extent lost its seductive, exciting ambiguity.

Ever since my arrival in Cairo, after carefully taming the urban space, I preferred to head to the southern macabre, the perimeter of which, approximately five kilometers long by a maximum two kilometers wide, extends, at the foot of the Citadel of Mehmet Ali and the lookout points of Al Muqattam, from the continuous hullabaloo of Bab al Qarafa to the quasi-desert of the residential districts of Al Basatin (The Gardens). Described for centuries by foreign and autochthonous writers, it was carefully drawn amongst others by Edward William Lane. Ibn Battuta stopped there and sketches a picture which, despite the passage of

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time, has not entirely lost its flavor: "At Misr (Fosthath or old Cairo) one can see the cemetery of Al Qarafa, famous for its holiness. . . . it belongs to the hill of Muqattam, which according to divine promise, will be one of the gardens of Paradise. In Al Qarafa the inhabitants of Cairo erect beautiful chapels, surrounded by walls, that look like houses. They build residences close by and support readers who night and day melodiously recite the Koran. Some individuals construct *zawiyas* and *madrasas* next to the mausoleum. They spend Thursday night and Friday there with wives and children and walk in procession around the famous tombs. They also usually spend the night there from the 14th to the 15th of *chaaban*, whilst traders offer a wide range of repast."

The City of the Dead has today a population of almost a million souls. They are born, grow, reproduce, multiply, age and die in the silent, condescending company of the deceased: it is a large minority, but a minority nevertheless who have taken refuge in the ancestral domain of death and developed, as I will have the opportunity to experience myself, a cultural and social life of their own, with its own norms, customs and rituals. I have not just seen burials in Al Jalifa: throughout an increasingly sweet, intoxicating sojourn, I attended weddings, parties, celebrations of circumcision and betrothal, family get-togethers, street football games. What began as an adventure and a challenge to myself was gradually transformed into a haven, a yearning for possession: gradual appropriation of a space in which, thanks to the hospitality of the living and the immediacy of the dead, I finally felt tranquil and experienced a delicate merging of feelings of peacefulness, harmony and benevolence.

In modern Western society the thought of daily coexistence with death arouses a feeling of anguish and rejection. Our death rites are reduced to mere pretence: incapable of bridging the gap opened between the objective certainty of its mortality and the inner desire for some form of survival, our tormented consciousness cannot have recourse as in days of yore to the assimilating beliefs and ceremonies of *backward* communities. Death is no longer accepted religiously or culturally as an integral part of our existence, it is a clandestine event behind the backs of the deceased and his social milieu. In metropolises like New York or Paris one can live for years without perceiving its troublesome intrusion. An efficient strategy of camouflage has whisked it out of sight, cleansed it from our language. Worse still: human beings have been deprived of their right to experience it as the natural outcome to a biological mutation. Stripped of its aura of dignity, the corpse is set out like a dummy, an object of painful wrangling between family and rapacious funeral parlours. This illusory denial changes cemeteries into arenas of anxiety and terror, where the living penetrate furtively and run from at top speed:

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burials are a hollow social act, the momentary disturbing effect of which is diluted in inane bustle. A well-marked frontier separates necropolises from the rest of the urban space and transforms them into ghettoes or ghostly shrines. The price individuals pay for this shameful covering up of death is revealed in their inner vulnerability and ostrich-like attitude to the brutality of their condition: as in other terrains, the return of what has been cast out insidiously contaminates the substance of our lives.

To become acclimatized to a cemetery like Al Khalifa is a healthy apprenticeship in the course of which the neophyte gradually sheds his worries and prejudices. Hardly glimpsed on my last visit to Cairo, it had symbolized in my eyes ever since the most distant boundary of unhappiness: the last most wretched suburb of a city whose monstrous growth condemned its children to disputing and snatching their territory from the deceased. After weeks of assiduous trawling, my impressions and ideas about it were modified. The City of the Dead is a colorful, fascinating urban agglomeration bursting with life, with districts which are ancient and modern, humble and aristocratic: the comfortable residences of the upper and middle classes run alongside enclaves and areas where poverty moves one to indignation. Traditionally inhabited by families settled next to their dead or by guardians of other people's mausolea, its population multiplied over the last decades with the arrival of tens of thousands of Nubians forced to abandon their lands submerged by the Aswan dam and with a growing number of Cairenes fallen victim to the housing crisis and the unbearable promiscuity of the slum districts. As I soon saw, a great number of the settlers in Al Khalifa feel privileged and are proud to live there. In spite of the insufficient and haphazard urban infrastructure – the almost general absence of drainage, running water and, sometimes, electric light – they enjoy a space beyond the aspirations of millions of their co-citizens piled together in the housing blocks in the center.

If, in contrast to Qait Bey, there has been only sporadic illegal occupation of pantheons, the laws of the property market impose their regulations in every transaction of sale, purchase or rental: speculation has sent sky-high the prices of the new mausolea built for the bourgeoisie become wealthy under Sadat. The concession of a lease or the safekeeping of a pantheon fetches very high sums, beyond the possibilities of most families. On one of my walks through Al Khalifa I came across the address of an estate agent, but my attempts at extracting a list of prices from him shattered against the wall of his stubborn suspicion: although I introduced myself as a Moroccan traveler in search of a home I was unsuccessful in sweeping aside his distrust of my hidden intentions. On the plots situated at the foot of Muqattam, it costs some 3000 pounds to excavate an underground tomb and the land is sold by the foot, as in

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housing developments in Guiza and Masar al Guedid. However, a good number of the mausolea in Al Khalifa remain empty and can be examined at leisure through the bars of the outer gates.

The pantheons I just peered into and those I entered at the invitation of their residents represented a very varied range of styles and eras. Generally they comprise a stone-slab courtyard surrounded by rooms whose doors face onto a covered lobby or lead to an arcaded portico almost always decorated with verses or quotations from the Koran. Sometimes, the tombs are raised to floor level and crowned with funeral memorial stones or stelas; others are hidden away in vaults whose architectural design, as I discovered later, corresponds to the one formed on the upper level by the home of the living; a narrow lobby at the foot of the stairs and two separate rooms for the corpses of both sexes. The patios are usually adorned with baskets of flowers and evergreen plants, and the walls display beautiful green tiles and kufic inscriptions.

The wrought iron gates to other mausolea open into gardens that have a wild, abandoned look. The autumnal impression of decrepitude and negligence, the product of the perennial cycle of the splendor and decline in bourgeois families, is intensified by those monuments erected to the eternal glory of their dead. The contrast between the original magnificence and the present state of ruin is a diaphanous illustration of this implacable process of degeneration which has always moved me as it has other writers. In one I glimpsed from the outside, someone had left a plate of seeds on top of a tomb – I am uncertain whether for its occupant or for all the wandering souls in the cemetery.

The precinct of inhabited pantheons makes up for the loss of this serenity through strange signs of life: clothes hang out to dry from the arcades, gas stoves smoke, fowl peck and pets rest next to the tombs or cenotaphs. The majority of custodians or tenants that I met originated from Al Saaid, and stood out from their northern compatriots by virtue of their blackness and handsome features. Open and hospitable, the Nubians willingly invite strangers into their homes and offer them a glass of tea. Their progeny are usually numerous and their wives with faces uncovered hover discretely in the background during any visit. The men work as bricklayers or stone masons either building or repairing pantheons, but there are also many taxi-drivers, office-workers and clerks whose jobs oblige them to leave the macabre. Many youths are unemployed and live on the iron solidarity of the clan. Nevertheless, in these mixed areas of the cemetery, poverty never goes beyond the limits of what is tolerable.

The spectacle of twilight in Al Khalifa offers an impressive array of colorful, violent contrasts. Weak and bloodless, the sun appears to be

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bled white, behind the reddened silhouettes of minarets and mosque domes. The atmosphere is soaked in a strange luminosity. The terrestrial sphere repeats its round with a population that also rotates: the difference between living and dead, superimposed in parallel layers in the mausolea and gradually fading into the shadows, is merely a question of time and degree.

The burial ceremonial in Al Khalifa has changed very little from the ones described by E. W. Lane in *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. The body of the deceased, carefully washed with soap and water, is wrapped in a *kefen* or green or white shroud before removal to its resting-place in an open coffin, usually covered over with a piece of linen. The eyes have been closed; ears and nostrils plugged with cotton wool; jaws tied with string to stop the mouth falling open on the journey; ankles strapped together; hands decorously laid on the chest. When the cortège leaves home and starts off, the faithful recite *suras* from the Koran, relatives and friends run after the bier and take it in turns to carry it on their shoulders at a lively pace, as if in a relay race. This good deed or *hasana* is highly praiseworthy, and everybody, including mere onlookers, reveals a desire to participate in order to enjoy the spiritual benefits. After the obligatory visit to one of the numerous mosques in Al Khalifa and the prayers of the *imam*, the retinue walks or drives – depending on the distance to be covered and the social status of the deceased – to the mausoleum or tomb where he will be buried. The women walk behind and sometimes burst out wailing and lamenting. Generally, upper-class burials are silent and restrained. One of my occasional companions, to whom I related this fact, just retorted ironically that the rich don't cry because they inherit money and property; the poor do because they are only left debts and expenses.

Thanks to my friend Ahmed, a master builder specializing in the construction of pantheons, I managed to examine the inside of one that had yet to enter service. A steep, narrow staircase, to be covered later with a stone slab, led to an underground granite sepulchre, oblong-shaped with a vaulted roof, comprising three rooms; a small lobby and two side-rooms, the entrance to which were adorned with verses from the Koran and a simple indication as to the sex of their future occupants. On the outside, a similarly oblong-shaped cenotaph is usually set above the hypogea with the memorial stones or stelas decorated with lines from the Koran, stone turbans and the name and titles of the deceased. Ahmed explains to me that the corpses are deposited in the vault in the place corresponding to them, facing right towards the *kibla*. The funeral chambers must be spacious enough to allow the soul of the dead to be visited and examined by two angels named Naquir and Muncar. On the

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first night, the soul will experience the tension and anguish of their questioning, and is consequently called *Lilat al Wahda* or Night of Solitude. Then, after the interrogation is complete, it will fly to the home of the just or the sinful to await the final judgment. According to other popular beliefs, the nomadic soul will wander throughout forty days, at the end of which mourning may be bid a definitive farewell on the occasion of the *Gumaa al Arbaain*.

On Fridays, the City of the Dead presents a striking spectacle of life and movement. A good number of Cairenes come to pray for their relatives and eat and rest in the pantheons. The sepulchres of those who have recently died are decorated with flowers or palm fronds. Some families set up a kind of canvas awning in the street, where the men receive condolences from their friends and drink a leisurely glass of tea. Whilst the bourgeoisie, in shirt and tie or bejewelled, take refuge inside their mausolea, poor people usually spread themselves, their tableclothes, and tea pots out by the side or on top of the tombs, welcoming inquisitive strangers and eager for distraction.

If the angels evoked by Ahmed show themselves only to the deceased, the goblins and demons that populate the cemetery do not always scorn the company of the living. One of my guides pointed out their wandering nocturnal presence in the area around Sayida Nafisa: they touched and even embraced the solitary walker, but vanished immediately God's name was invoked aloud. In the precinct of the pantheon looked after by his father, he added to convince me, one had taken up residence in the depths of a well. As I showed an interest in seeing the hiding-place, he took me to see its keeper. Leaning on his crook, the old man hobbled up to the outer gate with a weighty bunch of keys. He was in his seventies and had an extraordinarily expressive face: his eyes shone astonishingly brightly and, after stunning the body of his interlocutor, seemed to disappear into infinity. Once informed of my whim – I confess that the idea of an exclusive interview with his demon was extremely attractive – he led me into a dirty poky corner, where a collection of objects was piled up; on the stone bench there was a circular hole covered over with a metal lid. He lifted it up and shouted down, the din echoed and resounded in the well for almost a minute. After making sure of the impact of this, he covered over the hole and, before taking me inside the mausoleum, locked the door to the cubby-hole inhabited by the *aafrit*. By night, he told me, he also closed the pantheon from the inside, to stop the demon from slipping through and disturbing his sleep. After a long struggle with his keys, the entrance was opened and we were in a kind of spacious, vaulted chapel in the center of which was a large marble slab bare of decoration. The old man

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showed me the mess of blankets where he used to sleep, and invited me to share it with him if it appealed. I agreed and his face betrayed no sign of surprise.

Didn't my rest at his side perhaps satisfy the *dark object* of my desire? Was there any better cure or antidote against the anguish accumulated by the inevitable intrusions of Thanatos in my daily life? Did the fears that flourished insidiously under the wing of sleepsuffering, sickness, cancer, AIDS, old age – have a place within a mausoleum?

The motorways that gripped the City of the Dead were overflowing with cars, Cairo could be glimpsed in the distance with its lights and bustle, millions of people living the agony of their struggle to survive and I was enjoying, was able to enjoy with the old man a blissful, almost miraculous moment of peace. The journey on the *dark night* would become by his side *more certain than the light of the midday sun. Down secret steps*, quite unintentionally, I had discovered once again in the macabre the mysterious fusion of St. John of the Cross and Islam.

Obsidian approaches to the City of the Dead reserve for the besieger – even the Muslim besieger from elsewhere – infinite surprises. The profound internal coherence of the necropolis is revealed not suddenly but gradually, through successive perceptions and insights. Next to the areas of mausolea with patios and gardens are others where familiarity and immediacy with the deceased evoke even more powerfully the stubborn survival of millinery traditions. This promiscuous connivance is shot through with ancient customs of the Nile. The contiguity and unity of destiny between the dense collectivity of shadows and their ephemeral guests create bonds of complicity that are beneficial to both: the dead lose their profile of atavistic terror; the living are integrated into a world that will inexorably be theirs, but strengthened and soothed by such fruitful coexistence. Like other monotheistic religions, Islam has compromised with the pagan customs rooted in the peoples converted to its doctrine and has opted to assimilate them. The paintings and hieroglyphics on the hypogea of the Pharaohs reveal the daily life of the deceased with their relatives and servants. The expression on their faces is never sad: on the contrary, they appear radiant and calm. Everything recalls the most pleasant aspects and scenes of life on earth: freed from his body, the deceased passes into his *ka*, that immaterial form of shadowy double that prolongs the human personality awaiting reincarnation. In its subterranean universe, the noctivagous soul disposes not only of food and drink but also the usual domestic comforts. The funereal inspiration of Al Khalifa has reflected from its beginning this ideal of bliss and harmony: the structure and conception of its hypogea is a palimpsest of the ancient beliefs of the Pharaohs. In northern Egypt and in rural areas, Nubians still

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place symbolic offering of a loaf and a jug of water next to their tombs.

The sepulchres that jostle in the neighborhood of the Al Qadriya district merge imperceptibly with wooden pavilions destined for family leisure and brick-built houses bristling with television aerials. The inhabitants of these mixed areas hang out their washing to dry between memorial stones and stelas, little children play at perching on top of them, hens peck around them, and the sight of a goat tied by a leg to the cenotaph of some *ulama* – whose *chahid* is crowned with an emblematic turban – does not shock too greatly. The sepulchres, like the houses, tend to be ochre in color; but there are also plenty of lemon greens, and I have spotted some yellows, whites and oranges (only blue is rigorously excluded). Whoever zigzags amongst them hoping to lose himself discovers at every turn the remnants of previous visitations: rabbit hutches, pigeon lofts, flocks of sheep, a taxi waiting for its driver to have lunch, insolent Dodges and Volvos, a broken chassis. On the roof of a three-storey building, an extravagant advertisement of Canada Dry broadcasts the virtues of refreshment to a vast assembly of corpses. (Can the multinationals have decided to extend their range of influence into the after-life?) The house-facades of those who have been on the pilgrimage to Mecca are brightly painted: naive drawings outline the boat or plane in which the owners traveled, the odd camel or palm tree, the black canopy hanging over the Muslim sanctuary of the Kaaba. At a bend in the street, fifty-odd people are celebrating with *yuyus* and applause the wedding of two children from the macabre: the bride is also sporting her Pronuptia model, and a taxi will not fail to take her and her husband for the compulsory photograph of the happy couple in front of the Hussein mosque (I can already imagine the comic sketch sweeper in his customary choreographic stance, energetically scattering the dust!).

The images of destitution in the poorest parts of the cemetery are quite similar to those I observed beyond its walls in the course of my stay in Cairo. The shops selling State-subsidized goods – oil, soap, beans, lentils, etc. – are under continuous siege from the mass of people who subsist thanks to official ration coupons. At the entrance to the mosque of Sayida Nafisa, the giving of alms to the needy by benefactors who sometimes come from smart residential areas in Mercedes provokes a riot: a flurry of women wrapped in black veils falls upon the driver encharged with distribution, they jostle each other; one of the women in mourning falls stunned to the ground in the midst of the uproar, but quickly picks herself up, like a footballer who realizes that his pretence of injury has not drawn the referee's attention and that the game is going on without him. As a general rule, the inhabitants of Al Khalifa manage to endure

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their poverty with remarkable dignity: beggars are rare and the majority of families who invited me into their pantheon houses reproachfully rejected my clumsy attempts to thank them for their welcoming glass of tea by leaving them a note. When I later got to know Ahmed and his family, the generosity with which he responded to my presents showed me the lengths to which the pride and nobility of a modest family of Nubians would go. My final evenings with them touched me to the quick, bowled me over: all my preconceptions about life in the cemetery were swept aside. If, as Jean Genet wrote, *la solitude des morts est notre gloire la plus certaine,* the solitude the inhabitants of the macabre shared with them endowed my hosts with supreme moral beauty: their love for their neighbor glowed without expecting anything in return, as if awareness of the absolute equality of men before death had abolished with its elementary simplicity the loathsome barriers of power and money.

Will you ever return to Cairo? I mutter on the flight back, after noting that God the Father is enjoying a siesta with his cherubim on the eiderdown of clouds. When, how, why?

To be present as the monster ever devours itself, as it implacably gulps down its children? To spy on the final hecatomb, the violent explosion of its entrails? To applaud the burning of the palaces of the great? To be an impotent witness to the harsh survival of a people? To sink into a Louis XXVI armchair and watch the latest television creation?

At any rate, to keep my promise to Ahmed. To get a taxi on leaving the airport and ask the driver to take me to Al Khalifa. A bedroom, a patio, a garden: my familiar, hospitable pantheon in the City of the Dead.

Translated from the Spanish by Peter Bush

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EDITH KURZWEIL

TESTIMONIES AND STUDIES

I never imagined that the Holocaust would become a subject of study after being swept under the rug for nearly four decades. After I arrived in New York, in September 1940, no one showed much interest in my odyssey. By the late 1970s, however, colleagues who specialized in studying "survivors" wanted to interview me, to uncover the emotional scars. In the 1940s, of course, I was a typical teenager, and thus preferred to forget my nightmare immediately, to fit into America; and no one then was concerned about what this might do to my psychic growth. But recently, research on "survivors" has become almost as popular as post-modernism and feminist theory.

Among the latest batch of books,* the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman roots the event in the nature of modern society itself, in rational management. Another sociologist, Steven Lowenstein, sets out to understand the German-Jewish community he grew up in with his refugee parents – New York's Washington Heights. Most likely he interviewed a number of the forty contributors to Abraham Peck's compendium, who were asked to recall the circumstances of their flight, and to comment on the German-Jewish bequest to America, its relevance to democratic, and to Jewish, values. David Rosenberg asked twenty-seven young fellow writers to focus on "imagining" the Holocaust. To avoid "overdramatizations" and "underremembering," he wanted them "to personalize the Holocaust, and to represent the interplay of history, memory, and myth against a cardboard background." And the Austrian Gerald Szyszkowitz depicts the "underremembering" of his countrymen

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*Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cornell University Press, 1989.
David Rosenberg, ed., *Testimony: Contemporary Writers Make the Holocaust Personal*. Random House, 1989.
Abraham J. Peck, ed., *The German-Jewish Legacy in America, 1938-1988: From Bildung to the Bill of Rights*. Wayne State University Press, 1989.
Steven M. Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson: The German-Jewish Community of Washington Heights, 1933-1983, Its Structure and Culture*. Wayne State University Press, 1989.
Gerald Szyszkowitz, *Putigam or the Art of Forgetting*. Ariadne Press, 1990.

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in Graz – their accommodations to Hitler and their collaboration, by substituting cardboard myths for a shameful past.

Zygmunt Bauman, while surveying some of the literature on the Holocaust and the surrounding controversies blames modernity, leaning heavily on Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy. He holds that the "Final Solution," far from clashing with the rational pursuit of efficient, optimal goal implementation (to make Germany *judenfrei*), *"arose out of a genuinely rational concern, and was generated by bureaucracy true to its form and purpose."* Thus he goes against the thesis that the Holocaust was a unique event in Jewish history, an exceptional case of social madness.

Instead, he maintains that the Nazi's links between social engineering and state control, at the expense of a market-led economy and "pluralism generating mechanisms," allowed violence to turn into a rational technique, to be separated from emotions; and that such a situation may recur whenever social forces get divorced from a state bureaucracy in control of the military. This is a familiar argument by those who equate American involvement in Vietnam to Hitler's expansionist and genocidal intents, Stalinism to McCarthyism, and Mai Lai to Auschwitz. I do not mean to excuse such excesses either abroad or at home, and am as disturbed by them as everyone else. But I find that such blanket comparisons are counterproductive when taken out of context, when it is forgotten that citizens in Nazi Germany inevitably had internalized a heavily authoritarian ethos.

Bauman avoids these simplifications by demonstrating his familiarity with the many arguments scholars have constructed about the death camps, and by integrating a number of their theories into a "sociological theory of morality." Harking back to Hannah Arendt's point that individual moral responsibility was necessary in order to resist socialization into the Nazi ethos, he holds – against legitimation theories – that individual conduct may be moral even if condemned by the group; that a group may no longer be able to tell right from wrong; and that the responsibility which presupposes moral behavior was eliminated only after the Nazi's successes in "establishing" that the Jews were sub-human, not part of the German *Volk*: "The Final Solution would not have been possible without the progressive steps to exclude the Jews from German society which took place in full view of the public, in their legal form met with widespread approval, and resulted in the depersonalization and debasement of the figure of the Jew." The "social production of distance," which Bauman supplements with the analogy to Milgram's experiment in his laboratory ("assistants" administered ever increasing amounts of electric shocks to "subjects" behind a screen because they were told to do so), finally proves that the power of expertise triumphs

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over moral drives, and thereby legitimates immoral behavior. Bauman's argument does hold water. But he does not emphasize enough that Milgram's experiments began and ended in the laboratory, and that pluralistic societies have mechanisms to stop behavior which may result in a "Final Solution." Bauman, a Pole, wrote this book before the Iron Curtain came down. This may explain why he concludes that "we no longer dare to exclude the unimaginable." Unfortunately, he never says that he is alluding to the *Gulag*, or that his sociological theory of modernity intimates practices he does not mention in his book.

David Rosenberg invited "imaginative writers to reexamine American lives in the wake of the Holocaust . . . [in] its unending trail of absence." Inevitably, a number of contributors focussed on "absence" – one of the current postmodernists' concerns – and talked almost exclusively about themselves; others, among them Marge Piercy, recounted the travail it had entailed to understand the victims of Auschwitz before recreating them as fictional characters; yet others remembered that hearing about the Holocaust had made them realize they were Jewish. But those who had escaped as children or had watched their parents' agonies relied more on experience than imagination.

Leonard Michels, Daphne Merkin and David Lehman, in the lead essays, recall growing up with such parents – refugees who barely managed to escape, but whose own parents and other relatives were doomed. Lehman, for instance, depicts how his mother's thoughts were dominated by Hitler's hell rather than by the tribulations all grenhorns experience in America. As a little boy born after the war, he frequently responded to her helplessness, depressions and silent tears by retreating into "imagining things" – about Hitler, B-17 bombers and World War II. He often felt alone, "trangely invisible." His mother apparently told him that she had done "everything she could to save her parents after the *Anschluss* . . . until long after [they] were deported from Vienna in 1941 and killed in Riga on 12 March 1942." (Two of my grandparents, an aunt and a cousin were on the same transport, and my mother also kept concocting schemes to save them after they had died.) Merkin, a most protected child, first experienced the Holocaust as "a natural extension of the hostility [she] felt directed at her by her parents, siblings and schoolmates," and then was fascinated by the numbered tatoo she kept examining on the arm of an older cousin who came to visit. She speculated, for example, about her parents' Germanness, because they spoke German to each other, and often were nostalgic for their former life in Frankfurt. And why did her mother, when faced with the (inevitable) complaints by her six children tell them to *"just imagine you're in a concentration camp,"* unless she was as cruel as "Ilse Koch, wife of the com-

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mandant of Buchenwald?"

These three authors, too young to comprehend or miss grandparents and relatives they had never met, yet sensitive to the malaise of their parents, gave vent to their vivid imaginations. (We'll never know the extent to which the elusive burden of their childhoods turned them into talented writers.) Sooner or later, they connected the Holocaust to being Jewish, to denials or practices of religion (by themselves and others), to anti-Semitism and attitudes towards Israel.

For Geoffrey Hartman, who escaped as a child, memory is more vivid than imagination. After leaving Frankfurt on a children's transport when he was nine, feelings of homelessness alternated with the joy at being alive. In his neo-orphanage in England, he immersed himself in books to escape from reality. (I had the same reactions in my Belgian home *d'enfants*.) Seven years later, Hartman states, he rejoined his mother. By then, "I was an adolescent, she a stranger." He believes that the Holocaust informed his subsequent studies of literature and Judaica, his concern with Israel, and finally his need to counteract the malicious denial of the organized slaughter by revisionists. To compensate for the proliferation of media images glorifying the Nazis and degrading their victims, he helped in videotaping some of the witnesses to the genocide: they do not, as pop psychology has it, take on the features of the perpetrators. In each of their stories, "there comes a moment when their loneliness is brought home . . . at family celebrations . . . [when] among so many guests the family from which he comes – all those aunts, uncles, cousins – is represented by no one except himself." Max Apple reached a similar conclusion as he envied the rowdy (and otherwise unenviable) boys in his neighborhood for their cousins. Years later, he wrote a lively story that was inspired by his attempt to locate a long forgotten uncle whom he had tried to trace while on a visit in Argentina.

For eight years after Lore Segal arrived in England she "lived with five different [foster] families up and down England's class system and across its geography." She was fortunate that an English family eventually hired her Viennese middle-class parents as servants – her mother as a live-in cook and maid, her father as butler and gardner (jobs that ended up killing him.) Her loneliness is palpable as she describes living from one calamity to another and how, after *Kristallnacht*, she learned to detach herself from her feelings and became a "prickly" and "critical" child. Segal does not go into the pain she must have suffered "during the decades it took to become reattached." To convey the magnitude of these experiences without turning them into personal misfortune or cliché, she now makes sure not to dramatize, not to produce "a good read." Thereby, Segal does succeed in conveying much of the malaise by both

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child and adult Holocaust surviviors which, as other contributors to this volume imply or state, are universal. But unlike some of them, she avoids facile conclusions and superficial parallels between her own past and fears of possible nuclear destruction.

Alan Lelchuk started to ask questions about the death camps when he was eight years old, in 1948 – because he wanted to know about the numbers on his teacher's wrist. From his father's tales about the Cossacks, anti-Semitic Russians and Nazis, he concluded that in Europe they play at killing Jews, while in America boys play boxball and watch baseball. Twenty years later, he (unsuccessfully) tried his hand at Holocaust fiction. But the Holocaust came alive for him when he met a camp survivor who, over tea in Cambridge, told him of the grisly routines of everyday life in Majdanek and Auschwitz, when he read the diaries of Etty Hillesum who died in Auschwitz, and books by Primo Levi, Aaron Appelfeld, Raoul Hilberg and Saul Friedlander.

Mark Mirsky vaguely knew of the Holocaust during the war, and was afraid that "if the Germans win, I, my little sister, cousins, playmates would be killed," but then "tried not to think" of it and, instead, listened avidly to stories about the pogroms against the Jews in Russia. Did Mirsky's memories lead him to Judaic studies, and to his quest to understand the Holocaust? "What did it mean," he now wonders, since "the survivors cannot tell us anything [except to] ask us to remember what they suffered in our dreams."

Norma Rosen "experienced" the Holocaust when she accompanied her Viennese-born husband on his first return to Vienna more than four decades after having left with a children's transport. His parents perished. She is sensitive to this past, to the inability to forget it, because even "so simple a thing as a fork knocking against a fish bone may remind us." I first went back in 1956 and many times since then. Like Rosen's husband, I keep coming up against yet another place that reminds me of an uncle's store, an encounter with a schoolmate, sneaking away from a crowd watching a Jewish man scrub the sidewalk with a toothbrush, or running towards my grandmother to show her that my chafed knee was healing.

Rosen evokes the past by intermingling her husband's realities and memories with her own fictions, and thereby shows "how, after the Holocaust, we can live," and "gain distance" or even hope. Unlike Gordon Lish, who brags that he "does not have one useful thought about the Holocaust," and whose provocative and sardonic tone, I assume, is supposed to exemplify avant-garde writing and the conviciton that nothing, not even the Holocaust, is inaccessible to the writer who writes for money, Rosen has managed to evoke the complexity of the post-Holocaust horror.

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Most of the writers in *Testimony* manage to surmount the limits of what is essentially a navel-gazing exercise. Leslie Epstein, by telling of his affluent Hollywood childhood, as the son of a successful screenwriter, holds the reader's attention with an account of his early life. To me, this past explains the exaggerations that disturbed me when I read his *King of the Jews*. Epstein, immersed in the Hollywood hype of his childhood and in the conviction that "nothing was real," tells us that the new house with the swimming pool (around the corner from Joseph Cotton, Linda Darnell and Gregory Peck), all sorts of movie stories, and the war in the Pacific, were far more tangible to him than the Holocaust. Nothing wrong with that, except that Epstein's story would be more suitable for *The New Yorker* or *Vogue* than for this volume.

A number of these authors in one way or another attest to their generational, political beliefs. According to David Shapiro, they are "peace babies," whose lives were "to be all too stabilized and haunted by the twin horrors of the Hitlerian past and the nuclear future," and into whose sheltered existence an occasional anti-Semitic slur would intrude. Nevertheless, Shapiro says that he always thought of the Holocaust as more than parable or metaphor, that he does not feel adequate even writing of the taboos, but "celebrates each victim's desire for witness." And he (correctly) denounces Bruno Bettelheim's assumptions, and his arrogance of judgment when remonstrating *ex post facto* that European Jews should have forseen Hitler's "final solution" and left sooner – forgetting that quotas severely limited the number of emigrés. Ultimately, Shapiro recalls, the image of his grandfather's flight from Russia formed his own earliest conception of the survivor. And he concludes, with much sensitivity, that it is almost obscene to ask the "absurd aesthetic question of what kind of art must emerge after the Holocaust."

Abraham Peck's witnesses – historians, political scientists, writers and sociologists – resurrect the memories and contributions of this wave of emigrants which by now has been thoroughly absorbed into American and Jewish life. Their unique history, and their diversity as well, soon will be forgotten. In fact, they brought with them the spirit of German and Austrian Jewry, which was centered on the concept of *Bildung* – a secular belief in the new German Jew who would be accepted by his Christian neighbors, who would contribute to German art, culture, and humanism. In his introduction, Peck describes their Enlightenment legacy and the contradictions this legacy had created in relation to German nationalism.

George Mosse refers to the "inner-Jewish dialogue to which few gentiles in Weimar Germany listened." In exile, this legacy of *Bildung* was demonstrated in the form of self-cultivation, cosmopolitanism and a ra-

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tional attitude, a sense of moral responsibility – some of which inspired American students in the late 1960s (via the Frankfurt scholars and particularly Herbert Marcuse) and inevitably bolstered the best of liberalism. For Peter Gay, brought up in a totally assimilated and non-religious family, "the very idea of a German-*Jewish* legacy contains something of an irony:" he did not live "as a Jew" until Hitler forced him to. Both Georg Iggers and Guy Stern speak of their parents' libraries. Iggers notes that his family's bookcases were lined with the German classics his father had received as Bar Mitzvah gifts in 1907. Stern recalls novels about Christ-like figures (though not anti-Semitic ones) standing side by side with Stefan Zweig, Jacob Wasserman and Franz Werfel – illustrating the symbiosis *all* assimilated Jews experienced. When he returned to Germany as an American soldier, Stern not only learned of his parents' death in the Holocaust but listened to one of his prisoners admit casually that he had been involved in the killing of 25,000 people during a tour of duty in occupied Kiev.

Harry Zohn, translator and guardian of much of the Viennese and German-Jewish heritage, notes the relevance of this legacy to the "process of intellectual questioning and debate that is still with us," the "use of scholarship and intellectual authority as a weapon to stem the tide which threatened to engulf all rational and cultivated minds," and the "refusal to yield to the blandishments of panaceas or facile solutions, and . . . an informed vigilance." Alfred Gottschalk recalls growing up with Christian children in a small town, among his father's religious books and observances, and in the festiveness of his Jewish home. He was shocked at being expelled from school at the behest of an SS man in 1938. To him, German Jewry's only lasting contribution is the recognition that the end of German-Jewish life brought the realization of a common fate (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*). Before then, as a few authors note, the gap between those born into German and those coming up from the Eastern provinces seemed unbridgeable.

Joseph Maier elaborates on the inordinate influence, and the lasting role, of the Frankfurt School on American intellectual life. But he adds that some of them have become leaders in all branches of American Judaism. A good number lived in Washington Heights, where "you could tell a Yankee from a Yekke."

Steven Lowenstein grew up in this community of 20,000 refugees. In the tradition of empirical sociology, he begins by distinguishing between the visible elite group of intellectuals (only eighteen percent, including doctors and lawyers as well as stars such as Erich Leinsdorf, Erik Erikson, Albert Einstein and Peter Lorre) and the run-of-the-mill "refugees," who unlike most other groups of emigrants came to escape

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persecution rather than poverty. Lowenstein supplies statistics on population density and occupations, on rural and urban origins, and, among other things, describes these emigrés' multiplicity of religious observances and their means of integration into the American mainstream. On the traditionalist end of the spectrum, these "refugees" had not been highly assimilated to German culture and yet expected to maintain what they considered its best elements – while striving to remain (mostly orthodox) Jewish and to become American.

The Washington Heights community (its core was between 155th and Dyckman streets) expanded quickly after 1935 and by 1940 had eight synagogues, a number of kindergartens, community centers, athletic and social clubs. These served not only as a means of integration into America but as information and counselling centers to help get relatives out of Europe. Lowenstein catches the conflicts I remember well between learning to "pass" as American while being obsessed with the fate of relatives and friends who had been left behind. He grasps the importance of the German-language *Aufbau* as a means of communication – announcing social activities intended to "forget your troubles," carrying ads for apartments, and featuring more editorials and articles about the fate of European Jews than the major American press. And he is aware of the predicaments faced by newcomers who had been accustomed to a bourgeois life and now had to work as menial laborers, in the garment district, in bakeries and laundries, making deliveries and running errands usually under bosses less educated than they. Lowenstein goes into the refugees' proverbial thriftiness, into their reliance on institutional networks (synagogues, welfare and fraternal organizations, and clubs). I still recall being taken to dances at the Prospect Club and to the New World Club by a German girlfriend whom, in turn, I invited to my own bailiwick, the Austro-American Youth Club, and their differing visceral atmospheres. Lowenstein traces these clubs' evolutions, name changes, shifting foci on athletic and social activities, and their decline (or demise) into the 1980s, in relation to the community's altering needs and assimilation into the mainstream. And he fills in the details of Joseph Maier's report on the influence of Judaism – describing the specific spectrum of Separatist Orthodox, Communal Orthodox, Conservative and Reform practices.

The differences in cultural style between German and Eastern European Jews, states Lowenstein, tend to be unnecessarily stereotyped and often have led to misunderstanding. But on the whole, the Germans were more formal, and tended to value dignity, discipline, punctuality and order more highly than their Eastern counterparts who were more given to emotional demonstration – traits that manifested themselves in

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daily life as well as in religious practices. Still, as Rosenberg's writers also observed, people's relations to German-Jewish culture differed greatly between subgenerational groups, depending upon the age of arrival in America, on whether they were married there or here, had American-born children or themselves were born in America. Moreover, the younger people all along were moving away from Washington Heights long before the 1970s, and "German Jewishness is very much attenuated." Thus Lowenstein's prediction that "the thousand-year-old German-Jewish tradition" will merge into the larger American Ashkenazic Jewish tradition jibes with the *Testimonies* and the *Legacies*.

Puntigam or the Art of Forgetting is a novel about former Nazis and collaborators from Graz, Styria – one of the strongholds of National Socialism both before and during Hitler's reign. Enthusiastic Nazis, fellow travellers, convinced communists and would-be dissidents are represented as the protagonists in this lively story by Gerald Szyszkowitz, a novelist, television producer and playwright. He is "imagining" the distaff side of the Holocaust, mentioning it in passing, as the death of the Jewish Dr. Wertheimer is reported after *Kristallnacht*, as one or another soldier talks about the "camps" to Marianne, the daughter of the mill owner who had been an illegal Nazi until the day the Germans marched in and he became aware of their true colors. Though based on actual and creditable characters, from Marianne whose bent for truth no longer allows her to continue as a journalist after the Anschluss, to her cousin Friedemann who always knew how to swim on top of the tide, to the courageous communist Mattl, and to Thaya, the author does not pull any punches. He makes clear that there were few Austrians dauntless enough to oppose the Nazis, to join a resistance movement, and that the myth of Austria as the first of its victims served not only the former Nazis who came back *en masse* to take public office but helped the country get on its economic feet.

This book deserves mentioning because it is one of the few that deals with the most dishonorable part of Austria's past – a past that hit the headlines when Bundespresident Kurt Waldheim's shameful lies about his active collaboration were disclosed and, unaware that sometimes the truth does surface, some of his countrymen began to ask the questions their German brothers had been asking for some time.

Together, these books represent a cross-section of Holocaust literature. From Bauman's abstract theorizing to Lowenstein's empirical study of one emigrant community, from Rosenberg's writers' and Szyszkowitz's imagining of victims and perpetrators to the reconstructions by some of Rosenberg's and all of Peck's contributors, we learn more than we want to know about the Holocaust. Since I am one of

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those lucky survivors who reads the literature and watches the films (others find it too painful to be reminded), I thought I knew all that could be known. But I was not fully aware of the fact that had it not been for the childrens' transports, many fewer Jews would have escaped the Nazi death traps. (Nor did it occur to me then that Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom I cast in the role of savior, might have saved many more by easing immigration laws.) In my mind, I compared the round-ups in Vienna after the Anschluss to the huge fishnets I had seen the fishermen pull into the harbor of Viareggio, during the summer of 1937. So I wonder once again at my luck, at arriving in America on one of the last ships.

When lumped together, these books disprove that there is a best way of getting to understand what is beyond human understanding. Neither explanations blaming bureaucracy or evil, cowardice or opportunism, Weimar excesses or weaknesses, capitalism or socialist dreams, Hitler's charisma or fear of communism suffice. None of these explanations can come to terms with the blatant disregard for human life and the danger of ideology. If anything is to be learned from the Holocaust, it is that we must strengthen democratic dialogue and nip demagogy in the bud. But this will not bring back the cousins and other relatives we lost, nor keep us from wondering why we live and they died. Nor will it do away with the perpetrators' shame and guilt or answer their children's and grandchildren's insistent questions about "What did *you* do during the Nazi era?"

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LIONEL ABEL

On the Crimes of Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler

*For Albert Goldman**

In the late summer of 1945, I took issue with James Burnham (in Dwight Macdonald's *Politics*) for having maintained earlier that year (in the January issue of *Partisan Review*) that Stalin was the logical and appropriate successor to Lenin in the Communist hierarchy. A Marxist – and much more long-winded – argument to the same effect was given during the seventies by Jean-Paul Sartre (in the second volume of his *Critique de la raison dialectique*). Here Sartre tried to show that Stalin was chosen to be Lenin's successor, not just by the will of the Communist Party, arbitrary and manipulable as that no doubt was, but by the October Revolution itself, whose needs *required* the Party to reject Trotsky's bid for power and to endorse Stalin's.

I am convinced today that I was wrong in my condemnation of Burnham's article, and that he was substantially correct in his evaluation of Stalin as Lenin's appropriate successor, as was Sartre in his more recent discussion of the matter. Burnham was of course aware of Stalin's crimes, as was Saretre too, but each had his own prudential reasons for not saying in so many words that the dictator was a criminal, something any hack journalist, even of the left, may now do regularly. Which brings me to a question *not* regularly asked: if Stalin for all his criminality was the rightful heir of Lenin, then can Lenin have been innocent of crime?

More than a decade ago, when Lenin, and Stalin, too, had armies of journalistic defenders, Solzhenitsyn told us that in his judgment Lenin was a criminal. In fact, Burnham and Sartre have said the same, at least by implication. For to authenticate Stalin politically as Lenin's heir is to

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*Author's Note: Albert Goldman was Trotsky's defense attorney in Mexico at the Dewey Committee's inquiry into the charges made against Trotsky in the Moscow Trials.

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deauthenticate Lenin morally. Certainly Lenin was responsible, along with Trotsky, for the crime of *Kronstadt,* the pilot massacre in the long series of executions, one of whose latest episodes, "Tiananmen Square," we were able to watch on June 3rd of 1989, appropriately enough on television.

Lenin was – or thought himself to be – an orthodox Marxist. But is Marxism *in any sense* a moral doctrine? To those who regard it as such, Lenin, as things stand now, can hardly be an exemplary figure; he can remain a hero, however, to those who have always regarded Marxist indignation against capitalism and imperialism as so much political propaganda, possibly poetry of a sort. So before trying to judge Lenin morally, one must answer this question: in what sense is Marxism moral?

Professor Kai Nielson, the author of a philosophical work, *Why Be Moral?*, tried to answer this question in the Fall 1989 issue of *Social Research.* His article is entitled, "Arguing for Justice," and this is just what Marxists, according to Professor Nielson, are arguing for. Let me say at once that his discussion of the issue is a thoroughly academic one. I feel entitled to say this in criticism, because Professor Nielson has shown that he is fully aware of the insufficiency of academic argument on a political matter of this kind. To do him justice, when he condemned American foreign policy during our war with North Vietnam, he did not restrict himself to academic argument but actually renounced his American citizenship and betook himself to Canada, in one of whose colder provinces, Calgary, he is now teaching philosophy. Now to show in nonacademic fashion that Marxism argues for justice, Nielson would not have had to go anywhere: certainly he would not have had to leave Calgary for an even colder province. But he would have had to face up to a very warm political fact, namely that leading Marxists – and I include among them the compassionate and ethically-minded Rosa Luxemburg – have argued *against* the idea of justice. It was Rosa who called justice "that old Rosinante, on which our Don Quixotes ride forth to save the world, only to come back with their eyes blackened," which is hardly something to say about justice if what you are doing is to be called "arguing" for it.

According to Nielson, Marxism argues for justice in this sense; it condemns the capitalist's profit, which it claims has been subtracted from the worker's wage, and should properly be called "theft." Should not "theft" be condemned in the name of justice? Quite so. But what Nielson has failed to note is that Marx's objection to the capitalist profit was linked conceptually by him with the prediction that the system entailing it was going to founder, and that its end was already in sight. Were it not – such is my reading of Marx – capitalist wages might be objected

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to, but the only point of such objection would be to relieve one's feelings. When Marx called capitalist wages "theft," he was trying to change the system determining them. And in fact, unionized labor has indeed changed the wage system, at least under democratic governments.

But was it ever right to call the capitalist's profit "theft," whatever Marx's motive may have been in calling it that? I think not. On this point Kai Nielson does give a fair restatement of Jon Elster's argument against Marx's view, an argument I think irrefutable. Here it is: the worker's wage does not exist until he is paid it by the boss; Marx's assumption is that he is robbed before being paid, which is just not possible. Let us assume the worker is not paid enough, at least from his point of view. This is by no means the same thing as being robbed. I must add that Nielson, having stated this argument, makes no effort to meet it. Moreover, he has ignored Marx's intellectual purpose, even as he has ignored Marx's political motive in characterizing the capitalist wage system as "theft." In addition to making a moral point against capitalism, Marx wanted to explain how the system worked. He was trying to give an *explanation* of capitalist profit, which would also serve as propaganda against it, and the notion he hit on was that profit was taken from the worker's wages. But according to this view, the more workers employed in a given enterprise, of whatever type, the greater would be the profit. That such cannot be shown to be the case led certain Marxists (during the thirties) to suggest that all the profits of capital investment – subtracted from all the workers' wages—were piled in one kitty, divvied up by all the capitalists like the bills and bonds taken from a bank by robbers. Thus the profits of an enterprise with a few workers would be percentage-wise equal to those of an enterprise with many employees. But this was a hopeless argument, for there is simply no such kitty of capital. The Marxists who claimed this were simply extending metaphorically Marx's unjust characterization of capitalist profit. And if Marx's characterization of profit is unjust, can it be said that in making it he was "arguing for justice"?

In fact, however immoral or amoral Marxists have been in revolutionary action, this at least can be said for them: they were striving for power, not just arguing for justice. If we were to agree with Professor Nielson, to the other moral claims made against Marxists, we would have to add the charge of hypocrisy.

This brings me back to the question of Lenin's character, raised by the contention that for all his criminality, Stalin was Lenin's proper successor. Here I will not take up again Burnham's arguments, which I dealt with in 1945. For if Burnham's arguments were poor he was still correct in his conclusion. But I do want to look for a moment at Sartre's ar-

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gument for Stalin's leadership, which amounts to a choice, long after the choice was important, of Stalin's actual as against Trotsky's possible policies. Sartre claims that Stalin represented the *particularity* of the October Revolution, Trotsky the *universality* which the Bolsheviks hoped would crown their efforts, their aim being nothing less than an international revolt against capitalism. But even had the revolution spread over the continent of Europe, while incontestibly "international" it would not have been "universal" in scope. *Many* countries is not the same thing as *all* countries, many places is not everywhere, and the general is something other than the universal. *An international revolution in 1917 would have been a particular revolution to no less a degree than the one the Bolsheviks led.* Sartre's error here lies in thinking the difference between a national and an international revolution can instance the dialectical division of the particular and the universal. This seems to me a variant of the error Benedetto Croce long ago detected in Hegel's philosophy, when he noted that Hegel had constructed a dialectic of distinctly *different* terms which could hold only for terms that are *logically* opposed. And I must add that this error of Hegel is not unlike that in the economic dialectic of Marxism which sets up a *logical* opposition between wages and profits, a view which Marxists have been unable to defend.

For Sartre, Stalin represented the nationalist – Sartre calls it *particularist* – bias of a revolution which was intended to be international, but was stranded in a backward country, and Trotsky the internationalist aims of the Bolsheviks, which Sartre has called universalist. The two positions were summed up in different theories, Stalin's being the theory that socialism can be achieved in a single country, Trotsky's that the revolution would have to spread to succeed, and which has become known as the Theory of Permanent Revolution. Oddly enough, Sartre asserts both that the October Revolution itself opted for Stalin's theory of socialism in one country, and also that the theory was a monstrosity. He also holds that the theory was false when it was formulated, and only after that became true. He holds, too, that Trotsky's contrary theory was true when formulated and has since lost none of its truth. Then how could the theory of socialism in one country have become the kind of truth he, Sartre, may have disliked, but felt he had to abide?

Now in point of fact the theory of socialism in one country is not only monstrous but false. And the Theory of Permanent Revolution is also a monstrosity and also false, at least in part, as has been amply shown by events. And note this: the character and meaning of the October Revolution, and also the moral character of the Bolshevik leaders, Lenin and Stalin – Trotsky's role was more complex than theirs in view of his

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long struggle against Stalin – cannot but be affected by what we think of these theories, both of which Sartre claimed were true, both of which I hold in important respects are false.

Let me look at the Theory of Permanent Revolution. It consists of two propositions: 1)it is easier to make a revolution against capitalism in a country where such a revolution could not succeed than in a country where it might succeed, being on the order of the day, and 2)if made in a country in which it could not succeed, such a revolution would spread to a country or countries where it could not be initiated but might have every chance of success. Now proposition number one was vindicated if not proved by the October Revolution, which, aimed at capitalism, took place not in an advanced but in a backward country. The second proposition was of course not vindicated by the revolution, which did not spread from Russia to any other country of Europe. And all the problems of the Soviets: the deliberately imposed famine, the Trotsky-Stalin controversy, the purges, the crimes of Stalin, followed from the nontruth of this second proposition of the Theory of Permanent Revolution. What also follows is a possible charge of crime against Lenin himself. He acted finally on the supposition that the Theory of Permanent Revolution was substantially correct; if that theory is false, then the bloody actions he undertook on the basis of its assumed truth can hardly be justified.

One more point about this theory. Why could not a revolution against capitalism take place in a country where it had some chance of success, why was it *necessary* to start such an action in a country where it was almost certainly bound to fail? This question the Bolsheviks never replied to when it was raised by Martov. Moreover, they never considered what was to be done if the revolution did *not* spread. In not considering these matters the Bolshevik leaders, Lenin included, are open to the charge of criminal behavior which Maxim Gorky leveled against them immediately after their seizure of power in October of 1917.

I have found the two theories on the basis of which Lenin and Stalin justified their political deeds to be invalid, if not completely false. But this judgment is hardly enough to prove their immorality. If guilty of crimes, they are to be judged criminals. What follows from the validity or invalidity of the theories discussed is not whether or not Lenin and Stalin were guilty of criminal deeds; that they were. What follows from our judgment of their theories is an answer to a related question: are their crimes forgivable? Let us suppose for a moment that the theory of socialism in one country had proved true, the evidence for this being that the Soviet Union, instead of verging on economic catastrophe today could offer a higher quality of life to its citizens than obtains in the

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democracies of the West. It still would be the case that judged strictly, Lenin and Stalin would have to be found guilty of crimes. But who, under the circumstance I have supposed, would be interested in judging them strictly? I think they would be forgiven their deeds. Hegel (interpreted by Kojève) puts the matter thus: an action, however criminal, may be forgiven, if thanks to it some great purpose can be achieved.

It may be instructive to relate this notion of Hegel's to Macbeth's reasoning in Shakespeare's tragedy. For is not Hegel's thought Macbeth's thought, too? He assumes, because of the witches' prophecies, that if Fleance lives he, not Macbeth, will become king; thus his own venture in kingship must end in failure. He will not have established a line of kings, and thus will not be forgiven the murder of Duncan. Or, for that matter, of Banquo. Shakespeare, with his customary depth, shows us Macbeth most wracked by guilt right after he has been told that Fleance has escaped his killers. He might have felt less guilt for murdering the father had his men also succeeded in murdering the son. One guilt more might mean less guilt finally, and possibly forgiveness. That is how tyrants, also modern dictators like Lenin and Stalin, often thought.

Suppose we apply Hegel's reasoning about the morality of great action to the deeds of the Bolsheviks, and most particularly to those of their extraordinary leader, Lenin, whom Solzhenitsyn has called a criminal. Now is it proper to call him that? No doubt Lenin was responsible for the killing of thousands of innocent persons whose deaths brought no advantage to him personally or to the regime he headed. Was then Lenin guilty of crime? But the question has still not been properly put in the terms Hegel has suggested. For what we must ask now is this: Did Lenin succeed? Was the purpose for which the October Revolution was undertaken ever realized, even in part? We are now alerted to the fact that the present-day leaders of the Soviet Union are beginning to think their revolution anything but a success. (I was told some years ago by Andrea Caffi, an Italian socialist, who had visited Moscow in 1923, and there read Lenin's famous article "On Cooperation" just as it came off the press, that anyone who read the piece in Moscow at just that moment, and had some capacity to read between the lines, would have understood that for Lenin the revolution had already failed.)

We must note that the crimes committed by the Bolsheviks before Stalin came to power, and seldom regarded by radicals as crimes, provided the model for those acts of Stalin which the present-day Soviet leaders today call criminal. What Lenin ordered, which was not characterized as crime, justified for Stalin the actions Khruschev and the present Soviet leaders admit were criminal. The praise accorded the ruthless acts of Lenin no doubt provided inspiration for Stalin.

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And yet, in a way, Stalin was trying (he had other objectives, to be sure) to prove Lenin's and his own deeds forgivable, when he claimed that socialism in one country could be achieved. If it were, then the failure of world revolution would not invalidate morally the decision of Lenin to overthrow the Kerensky government, from which followed all the crimes of the Soviet leaders.

Sozhenitsyn has detailed many of these crimes in his book, *The Gulag Archipelago*. But there are two stories about Lenin, told to me by Andrea Caffi in Paris in 1949, and attested to by Ignazio Silone in Rome in 1962, which for me at least best convey the attitude which made the Bolshevik's crimes possible, and accepted. The first tells of Lenin at a Party affair in Finland, before the revolution. A young recruit announced to Lenin that he was quite ready to die for the Party, and Lenin was unimpressed. "Many are," he replied, "so my question to you is this: 'are you ready to pimp for the Party?' " The other tale has to do with executions after the revolution. A comrade, well known to Lenin, came to see him with a complaint against the secret police. They had arrested his son and were about to execute him. And the man swore his son was innocent. "I do believe you," replied Lenin, "but I know that nine out of every ten persons shot by the G. P. U. are innocent. Why should I intervene just for your son? And since I need the G. P. U., I have to put up with their mistakes and injustices." In these tales we may grasp the criminal thinking of the Bolshevik leader from which followed the particular illegalities and cruelties catalogued by Solzhenitsyn. What we have here is the denial of moral experience as such.

Once again, despite their enormity are these crimes forgivable? By Hegel's standard, yes, if something great was achieved which could not have been brought into being otherwise, for instance: an international revolt against capitalism or socialism in Soviet Russia. The first was no longer possible in the early thirties, when Hitler came to power, the second Trotsky and his followers claimed was contrary to Marxist theory. But in that case there was no possible exculpation of the Bolsheviks, and to say as much was also a crime. From this thought we may get some sense of Stalin's hatred for Trotsky and his supporters, of Stalin's reasons for staging the show trials and for ordering Trotsky's assassination.

That the Bolsheviks did not achieve their declared goal is incontestible, but there were positive developments throughout the world as a result of their actions, which should moderate our judgment if not excuse their crimes. So I must insist here on the clear difference between communism under Lenin, even under Stalin, and the Nazism of Hitler, the fascism of Mussolini. This difference has been blurred of late. There was Susan Sontag's remark in a speech just a few years back in which she

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dubbed Soviet communism – which the Russians tell us has been a failure – "successful fascism." And there was the equally absurd counter-judgment of Soviet communism by Michael Walser, a respected professor of political science. He dubbed the Soviet state an instance of "failed totalitarianism," as if the goal of the Bolsheviks had been totalitarianism, rather than the international revolution, or alternatively, socialism in one country.

And on October 31st of 1988, Marjorie Brady, Director of the Russian Research Foundation in London, told us in a column in *The Wall Street Journal*, that there may be a fascist element in *perestroika*, so that what we take to be a democratic development in the Soviet Union may be in fact a turn towards the corporate state Mussolini brought into being. And the London sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman, in his recently published (and much overpraised) book, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, has stressed what he finds similar in the criminal procedures of Hitler and Stalin. Their victims, Bauman claims, were executed ". . . because they did not fit, for one reason or another, the scheme of a perfect society. They were eliminated, so that an objectively better human world – more efficient, more moral, more beautiful (sic!) – could be established. A Communist world. Or a racially pure, Aryan world."

Were the Communists and the Nazis similar in their grandiose aims as in their criminal deeds? If Bauman is right in the judgment I cited, it would be impossible to distinguish morally between the Bolsheviks and the Nazis. To do so one would have to show – and I think this can be shown – that the Bolsheviks regretted the terrible methods employed by the G. P. U., and *one cannot say this of the Nazis*, who for the most part thought the world more beautiful and more human *because of the methods employed by the Gestapo*. And there are these indirect results of the October Revolution: independent nations in Asia and Africa. One cannot imagine the slightest increment of freedom or independent sovereignty for any nation in any part of the world had Hitler been the victor in the late war. So Bauman's equalization of the Nazis and Bolsheviks simply does not hold. And I must add one other point, which I take from a great story of Borges. A Nazi officer, who has overseen the gassing of a Jewish dramatist, applauds the execution, noting that by such deeds he and his colleagues have introduced into the world a moral coldness which no one will be able to expunge. What Borges the poet has seen and Bauman the sociologist has missed, is that the Nazis did not differentiate their methods from their goals, which in fact the Bolsheviks did. The Nazis thought themselves great because they were capable of deeds the rest of humanity regarded as unforgivable. The Bolsheviks believed they were creating a world such that their efforts in constructing it

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could be forgiven or forgotten.

In judging the deeds of the Bolsheviks, I have used a literary model, bringing up Macbeth's effort to justify his murder of Duncan by eliminating Banquo and his son. Now to judge Hitler, I will need a different model, and I have chosen Raskolnikov, the murderer described by a modern novelist, and I shall contrast him with Macbeth in just one respect. Raskolnikov had no great purpose in mind when he killed the pawnbroker. His aim was murder and nothing more, murder as the reward for murdering. Lady Macbeth reproaches her husband with: "What you would highly you would holily," as if this were a character defect in him. But this is in fact an accurate description of Macbeth's attitude prior to his first crime. At a similar moment in his career, Raskolnikov cannot be so described. What he wants is precisely to act unholily. He murders to prove himself capable of murder. If Macbeth in his subsequent murders sought forgiveness for his initial crime, Raskolnikov's first murder was an attempt to prove himself capable of other, equally unforgivable deeds.

Here we may glimpse a moral difference between the Nazi and Communist dictators. I grant that Stalin ordered the torture or death of many more persons than did his opposite number in the Reich. Yet I do not think we have to place the two dictators on the same moral plane. Stalin at least wanted to justify the October Revolution, and all of the Bolshevik crimes that followed from its failure. Hitler, in destroying Europe's Jews, could not have wanted to do anything more than prove himself inexorable, for no military advantage was achieved or even aimed at in the Holocaust. And let us speculate: What if Hitler had been victorious in the Second World War? Would his name have been sacred fifty years after victory, as Caesar's was in the Roman Empire set up by Octavius? To be sure, we cannot know what might have followed from what never occurred. But it is at least possible to think that after the success of German armies, with the passage of time, there would be some investigation of Nazi deeds and a critical appraisal of Hitler. Did anyone expect Khruschev to denounce Stalin only three years after the dictator's death? Some fifty years after a Hitler victory there might indeed be motivation for a closer scrutiny of the dictator's deeds. We have just had the admission by Soviet leaders that the execution of the Polish officers in the Katyn forest was ordered by Stalin himself. What about Hitler's war on the Jews? It is at least thinkable that some German scholars would sort out the true facts about the Holocaust and advance the thought that this adventure in crime had played no part in Germany's military successes, and that the Auschwitz and Treblinka exterminations were without military meaning, being motivated solely by the German

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dictator's desire to commit inexpiable deeds, and to position himself, proud of being unforgivable, in the pages of history.

But I do not want to terminate these reflections without expressing regret for the judgment I have been forced to make of Lenin, whom before this, like others of my generation, I greatly admired. And regret occasions recollection. More than forty years back, Harold Rosenberg, who had not yet ventured into the art criticism which later made him widely known, confided to me that he had begun to write a play. He had always wanted to write plays, he said, but the particular play he had in mind to write then was to be about Lenin's burial. His script called for Stalin and the other Communist Party leaders to follow the hearse bearing the body of Lenin to the tomb where it is still exhibited. Lenin's widow, Krupskaya, would halt the procession with the demand that Lenin's corpse be given a modest grave like any Soviet citizen's. An argument would then develop between Krupskaya and Stalin, the former stressing Lenin's identity with the masses he led, the latter pointing to the propaganda value of investing Lenin's corpse with pharaonic splendor. In Rosenberg's script, Stalin would of course fail to convince Krupskaya, and then would have her dragged away by his police. I remember that I thought the idea a marvelous one, and for some time kept asking Harold about his script. I urged him to complete it and offer it to a producer, and in the new period of off-Broadway theater right after the war, an intellectual play of that sort could have made the stage. But Harold was afraid, I think, of being charged with anticommunism, dropped his script and turned to his other projects. He did say to me, though, after Khruschev's attack on Stalin, and the removal of Stalin's body from the tomb where it had been placed beside Lenin's: "You see, I was right to connect the positioning of Lenin's corpse with bureaucratic policy. . . . When there is freedom in Soviet Russia, Lenin's corpse will be given private burial. . . ."

Should this indeed occur, what feelings will be expressed? Rosenberg still assumed that the Soviet experiment would succeed and that when the weight of the regime was lifted, its citizens would be able to enjoy much better lives than in what was then called "the capitalist world." But such optimism about the Soviet future is no longer possible. I believe that Lenin's corpse will be removed from his present tomb and be given private burial. But this will not take place in an atmosphere of respect for the Bolshevik leader, rather in one of unrelenting polemic against his ideas and his deeds. He will not be forgiven for all of those deeds, and he may even be condemned for an act not his, and for which he was in no way responsible: the exhibition of his corpse, enshrined like Pharaoh's, for the masses to worship.

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JULIA KRISTEVA

The Strangers

The Enlightenment, and the French Revolution as well, has spawned a wealth of ideas about such concepts as nation and foreigners, mankind and the masses; these have become more and more complex, for we are still living with that inheritance – its dignity, its contradictions, its tolerance, and its pitfalls – and can project our present sensitivities onto them. As we can pick out just a few of those aspects that are inherent in what I shall, to simplify matters, call the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, let us think whether a society without foreigners is possible.

Beginning with Montesquieu's neostoicism and including Diderot's pantomime of human strangeness or the cynicism of cosmopolitans rebelling against all sacred values, the eighteenth century was to hand down to the Revolution an ideology of human equality that, from the "rights of man" to the "rights of the citizen," proved hard to manage when facing the onslaughts of political passions, war, and the Terror.

Without dodging the problem of our antagonisms but in opposition to Hobbes who posited a state of war inherent in nature and in human society, Montesquieu (1689-1755) affirmed the notion of *human sociability* at the outset of *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). More timorous than malevolent, human beings would nevertheless join together naturally, and their political constructs could hardly be the art of "building iniquity into a system" but on the contrary would succeed in working out a "moderate form of government." Such a sociability has forerunners with Cartesianism (the jurist Jean Domat), Christian theology (Fénelon), English neostoicism and empiricism (most particularly with Locke and Shaftesbury). It found its anchoring in the economic history of the eighteenth century, which Montesquieu attentively scrutinized and described as a period of increasing wealth, of unprecedented expansion of trade, and of economic and political liberalism that, in his eyes, would insure

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the possibility of social peace. Whether it be Christian charity, or the ideal of the whole of mankind achieving the satisfaction of all, or the liberal trade economy of the time – there are numerous, heterogeneous factors that, with Montesquieu, come together and enable *The Spirit of the Laws* to be founded on such an intrinsic sociability, which government policies should both make explicit and guarantee. Now, I shall extract Montesquieu's concern for *totality* and one of its major consequences – his *cosmopolitanism*.

A totality encompassing *nature* and *culture*; *men* and *institutions*; *laws* and *mores*; the *particular* and the *universal*; *philosophy* and *history*: These are multiple series among which *mediations* are at work which at the same time insure the tempering of institutions and that of human beings. Indeed, "On Laws and the Relationships They Have with the Principles that Shape the General Spirit, the Customs, and the Manners of a Nation" is the title of the fundamental XIXth Book of *The Spirit of the Laws*. Here an *ideality* has been positied (the "general spirit"), of which the stoic and Christian, natural and "liberal" genealogy has been pointed out, and which is a fundamenetal prospect of Montesquieu's political thought.

This *fully-social*, which is also considered here on the level of the nation, neverthless reaches its climax when Montesquieu tackles the *totality of the species*. His thinking is weighed down with fatalistic determinism (particularly climatic) and conceives the political fabric of the globe on the basis of the sociability and "general spirit" that govern the human species finally restored to its actual universality through the modern expansion of trade. The nation's burden, so often acknowledged, is then transposed in order to be absorbed at the heart of a *borderless* political philosophy dominated by politics, understood as the maximal integration of mankind in a moderate, attainable ideality. Traces of it may be found in the less technical text of Montesquieu's *Thoughts*. To be sure, he asserted, "I love only my homeland." But also: "When I traveled in foreign countries, I became attached to them as to my own; I shared in their lot, and I should have liked them to be in a flourishing state." His political reflections, national as they may be, were not nationalistic: the good State was conceived for others, for all. Mankind, thus united by the ethical will of the political thinker becomes nevertheless *historically* specified as an international society made possible by the development of trade, dominated by Europe, and dependent on a moderate regulation of the flow of goods and currency. We should note this observation, astonishing for its modern tone:

> Europe is no more than a Nation made up of several others, France

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> and England need the riches of Poland and Muscovy as one of their Provinces needs the others; and the State that thinks it increases its power through the downfall of its neighbor, usually weakens along with it.

Such a universalizing argument, which, as I pointed out, is based on reflections related to a nation's economic and social policies, both foreign and domestic, surprisingly leads to a premature warning (which foreshadows Hannah Arendt's position) against distinguishing the "rights of man" from the "rights of the citizen"; for it is indeed true that with Montesquieu any political policy, in the full sense of the term, is implicitly a cosmopolicy because it includes the totality of human beings, the "general spirit." Montesquieu's cosmopolitanism was more than the outgrowth of a naturalistic rationalism that might have been derived from the stoics. Concurrently with the birth of modern political thought, a historical necessity has taken shape, which the nationalism of the two centuries that followed Montesquieu's time has bypassed, but whose urgency, for us, he has heralded. If *The Spirit of the Laws* is to remain faithful to the fundamental sociability and the moderatable ideality that the distinguished political thinker has presupposed, Nation-States must give way to higher political systems.

Now, assuming that such a cosmopolicy is the expression of the associative and integrative spirit that governs Montesquieu's political thought, it goes hand in glove – need this be restated? – with setting up a safety network that should prevent the brutal integration of differences (and, to begin with, that of the *social* and the *political*) into a totalizing, univocal set that would eliminate any possibility of freedom. The separation of powers, the preservation of a constitutional monarchy whose possible excesses would constantly be checked by a reasonable judiciary, the very belief in a social peace based on the freedom of individuals and obtained by upholding the dichotomy between the social and the political that is represented by the organic enactment of power in the royal figure – those are the strong features of Montesquieu's thought, which resurfaced in the liberal, post-revolutionary conservatism of Benjamin Constant or Alexis de Tocqueville; they constitute the saftey network I referred to and should be pondered in the light of his cosmopolicy.

The obliteration of the very notion of "foreigner" should paradoxically encourage one to guarantee a long life to the notion of . . . "strangeness." From such a viewpoint it is essential to respect what is *private*, or even *secret*, within a fully-social domain that would not be homogenous but preserved as a union of singularities. The singular should not be confined only to the figure of the monarch, who might be

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tempted to embody perfect legality, but above all in the "weakness" and "shyness" of his subjects, who are subject to cosmopolitical laws only when their rights to concord are recognized on the basis of their singularities, which cannot in themselves be harmonized. Beside the *political* and the *social*, there would then emerge, in a dignity that cannot lawfully be bypassed, the *private* domain. At the same time, the level of political power would find itself scaled down in its intrinsic use and distributed between the *social* and the *private* sectors. That implies not only that "heroes" and "great leaders" in politics are vanishing, but that there is a new concept of politics, understood as an attempt to harmonize what is irreducible through an interplay of diversified systems and stratums. Let us not forget that Montesquieu's cosmopolitanism was the consequence of his fundamental concern to turn politics into a space of possible freedom. His "modernism" is to be understood as a rejection of unified society for the sake of a coordinated diversity.

Within that frame of mind, the image of the "good savage" that had already been coined by the Renaissance underwent a metamorphosis. What comes into view is a *foreigner*, as odd as he is subtle, and who is the *alter ego* of national man, one who reveals the latter's personal inadequacies at the same time as he points to the defects in mores and institutions. The *foreigner* then becomes the figure onto which the penetrating, ironical mind of the philosopher is delegated – his double, his mask. He is the metaphor of the distance at which we should place ourselves in order to revive the dynamics of ideological and social transformation.

This apology of the "private" and the "strange," including "idiosyncracies" – which, however, does not cease being the leaven of a culture when the latter is aware of and transcends itself – reaches a power that still enthralls us today in the writing of Denis Diderot (1713-1784). The pinnacle of those peculiarities that other eighteenth-century writers had depicted under national colors, *Rameau's Nephew* (written in 1762, published in German in 1805, in French in 1821) internalized both the discomfort and the fascinated recognition aroused by the strange and carried them to the very bosom of eighteenth-century man. If he were to wander to the end of his passion for altering, dividing, knowing, modern man would be a foreigner to himself – a strange being whose polyphony would from that moment on be "beyond good and evil."

When Diderot "allows [his] mind to rove wantonly," a henceforth famous partner answers him in an open dialogue, without synthesis; it is a text the cynical, "Menippean" derivation of which has often been emphasized. That partner is one of those "peculiar characters," one of those "eccentrics," held in little esteem by the philosopher, who nonetheless

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lets him dominate the conversation – Rameau's Nephew.

Who is the Nephew? The philosopher's opponent or his hidden self? The opposite other or the nocturnal double that comes to the surface? A clear-cut answer to the question would bring the pantomime to an end and betray the "mental trollops" that Diderot, in an extraordinary flight of polyphonic fancy, presents in fact through the confrontation between *Myself* the philosopher and the strange *He*. Different and accomplices, others and the same, *Myself* and *He* are in conflict, agree, even change places (*He*, insolently, all of a sudden extols virtue . . .) Rameau's Nephew *does not want* to settle down – he is the soul of a game that he does not want to stop, does not want to compromise, but wants only to challenge, displace, invert, shock, contradict. Negation, this is understood, not only of conscience and morality but of the will as passion: a twisting of sexuality – and then a negation of such negations.

The Nephew is the cynic's cynic: he experiences its rhetoric and carries it to its peak, remaining up to the end foreign to ethical identity, even that of the cynic. In that sense, the Nephew is closer to a cynic who left his imprint on literary genres by inventing a new model of satire – Menippus of Gadara, who, besides, was a corrupt usurer and ended up hanging himself. Diderot speaks of him in his article on the "Cynic": "Menippus . . . was one of the last cynics of the ancient school; he made himself more commendable for the kind of writing to which he gave his name than for his morals and his philosophy." Bakhtin sees him as the founder of dialogism and of that rhetorical polyphony out of which the Western novel arose. Outside of the ethical heroism of Diogenes, who succeeded in submitting the passion-inspired strangeness of natural man to a moral imperative, the Nephew, and Diderot too, leave such asceticism to Rousseau; they adopt only its acceptable portion – the play in language, the logical violence that destroys and does not cease being aware even of its own disappearance. The Nephew's pantomime is faithful only to Menippus's rhetoric, not to Diogenes's virtue. Diderot never conveyed so drastically the fact that the ethics of his day could only be a given language: a cultivation of strangeness to the very end, without finish or conclusion.

Such a scouring of apparent identities – ethicl or logical – is supported by a biological model. Diderot shows himself to be very much mindful of it in his *Eléments de physiologie*. He goes so far as to view any sensation as bound to "organic convulsions." Indeed, when the Nephew reaches the climactic frankness of his pantomime, he reveals his "thoughts," which are at the same time sensations, through a language made up of spasms, convulsions, and starts. Strangeness, which we have seen as rhetorical (cultural), would be neurological in nature (organic):

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"There is not the slightest difference between a wide-awake physician and a dreaming philosopher," as long as both scrutinize the strange.

Surreptitiously, strangeness is also political. A rhetorician with peculiar nerves, the Nephew could not have come from a single place, a single side, a single country. From the very outset he regrets – which is to say, admires – that men of genius "don't know what it is to be citizens"; and they are precisely the ones he wants to resemble, they are an exceptional model not to be imitated by the crowd. Putting citizenship aside, what would then be the vessel for the unrestrained pantomime performed by such a convulsive harpsichord player? *He*: "I look about me and take my positions, or else I entertain myself watching others take theirs." The stance is temporary, movable, changing – if steady, it is artificial; provisional, it is wandering. Original, it strays from the origin, it knows neither root nor soil, it is traveling, foreign. "In the whole country only one man walks – the King. Everybody else takes a position." The strange Rameau is surely not the King. But is the King still sovereign at the time the dialogue takes place? "One has a homeland, under a good king, none under a bad one," Voltaire asserted. *Myself*, who often really embraces at full tilt the logic of *He*, and even forestalls it, believes that even the King postures before his mistress and before God. But in such a case, would there even be a king? Would there be a kingdom, since it would lack a king? Would anything, when there is no sovereignty, beginning with the kingdom? The strange man, spasmodic and pantomimic, would be the inhabitant of a country without power, the sociological symptom of a political transition. Would it not also mean that the political institutions that are undergoing a crisis no longer insure the symbolic identity of the power and the persons? *Myself* the philosopher generalizes human instability, which he suspects lies with all as soon as there is dependency on the other. More pragmatic, however, the Nephew comes out with it: the king must walk if the kingdom is to be. Or else – and *Myself* confirms the royal poverty – there is no longer a kingdom whereon to stand. Relieved of political power, the posturing man is the same as a man without kingdom.

A "lumpen-intelligentsia" thus emerged above nations, refusing to belong to phantom kingdoms and ravaged countries. "Cosmopolitan" reverberates like a challenge, if not like a mockery. Jancourt's article in the *Encyclopédie* points out that "cosmopolitan" or "cosmopolite" is used sometimes jokingly to refer to one "who has no fixed abode" or one "who is nowhere a foreigner." The first text to bear the title *Le Cosmopolite ou le citoyen du Monde*, in 1750, is signed by Fourgeret de

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Monbron. It has often been suggested that *Rameau's Nephew* might have been inspired by the cosmopolitan who described himself to the philosopher as having a "shaggy heart." An angry text, scoffing at all nations (beginning with the English and the Turks, including the Spanish, the Italians, and of course the French, and so on) and even more so all beliefs, *Le Cosmopolite* advocates, in an offhand way and not without skill, hatred and selfishness as antidotes to hypocrisy. The drama of the foreigner, tossed from his bruised narcissism to a fascinated hatred for the other, could find its expression in this embittered text, the excessiveness of which suggests, across the centuries, Zeno's *Republic* and Menippus's cynicism. Diderot's genius changed such intentions, straightforward to be sure but brutal and immoderate, into a rhetoric that is also emancipated and yet composed with an art that endows drives with adequate signs.

The pejorative meaning of the word "cosmopolitan" was undoubtedly enhanced by such provocations that further irked the protective feeling for the nation, jealous of its prerogatives. "Whoever does not adopt his homeland is not a good citizen," as the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* notes in 1762, in the article "Cosmopolitan." And Rousseau among others: "Any partial society, when it is close and well-knit, becomes alienated from the larger one. Any patriot is hard on foreigners; they are mere men, they are nothing in his eyes. This drawback is inevitable, but it is slight. The essential is to be good with the people one lives with. . . . Beware of those cosmopolitans who seek far off in their books duties they fail to accomplish close by." Montesquieu all the same asserted along with Shaftesbury a positive value for cosmopolitanism, in a century of many famous cosmopolitans. "Although one should love one's homeland, it is just as ridiculous to speak of it with prejudice as it would be of one's wife, birth, or property. How foolish vanity, wherever it is shown!" With its raging reverse and generous obverse, between Fourgeret and Montesquieu, cosmopolitanism henceforth appears as an audacity, utopian for the time being, but which must be taken into account by human beings who are conscious of their limitations and aspire to transcend them in the organization of social bonds and institutions.

When, in its dialectical motion, the world of the Spirit becomes foreign to itself, Hegel dreams that two parts of the spiritual world start facing each other: actuality and pure consciousness. "But the existence of this world, as also the actuality of self-consciousness, depends on the process through which self-consciousness divests itself of its personality, by so doing creates its world, and treats it as something alien and external, of which it must now take possession." This process is, as Hegel saw it, constituted by culture (*Bildung*) – political, economic, social, intellectual

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– as *estrangement* of the natural being. The transition of the *thought-constituted substance* to *concrete actuality* is thus effected, as, conversely, that of *determinate individuality* to its essential constitution.

This argument came to a head with the Enlightenment. It relies on *Rameau's Nephew* to illustrate the notion of culture as estrangement of the individual into the universal, and vice versa. The strangeness collected at Diderot's font takes on three aspects: Individuality becomes stable only by giving up the self for the universal: that is the role of *Myself* the philosopher. Still relying on the Nephew's experiences, particularly the episode at Bertin's house, while trying to extract from them a dialectic of abjection between patron and client, Hegel brings out the logic of the French monarchy as another illusion of self-estrangement. Finally, the "distraught utterance" is the major representation of cultural estrangement. Through an ultimate reversion, it does not become frozen into the "placid consciousness" of a self that is unaware of its underlying contradiction but on the contrary abolishes the distinction between "noble" and "base," confronts wealth with the inner abyss, expresses a "rebellion that repudiates its own repudiation," knows its naturalness, its flattery, or its abjection; in short, to each of its moments it attaches its opposite. "The distraught and disintegrated soul is, however, aware of inversion; it is, in fact, a consciousness of absolute inversion."

This sort of strangeness, which Hegel also describes as "self-transparent" and "distracted" or as "a universal deception of itself and others," becomes the "greatest truth" on the very account of the "shamelessness manifested in stating this deceit." One is struck by Hegel's faithfulness to that cynical polyphony of culture embodied by the Nephew. He raises it above "that simple, placid consciousness of the good and the true," characteristic of the philosopher *Myself*, who can "say nothing" and is "merely an abstraction," barely capable of gathering "into a trifling form the meaning of what spirit said." Nevertheless, this strangeness of culture, even though it be highly appreciated, remains yet with Hegel a "perversion" that, as scintillation of the spirit and all the more so of witticism, must be transcended. The polyphony of Hegel, a careful reader of Diderot, gives way before the triadism of his dialectic.

Out of the many implications of remarks on cultural estrangement as opposed to moral and religious conciliation, one might consider a few concerning the novel, the imagination and their present shape – the mass media. The perversion that sets up the opposites in human signification facing each other, with neither synthesism, nor internalization, nor supercession – that is indeed novelistic culture in the polyphonic sense of the French eighteenth century. It still underlies the great imaginary syn-

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theses, religious in inspiration, of the nineteenth century, such as Dostoyevsky's dialogism, which shattered the believer's virtue by dint of idiocy.

One might well ask if France has not preeminently continued to be the area of culture – in the sense of Hegel's "perversion"; one might ask if it has not identified with culture, and if culture, defined in such a manner, is not definitively French. . . . When the perverseness of values establishes the subtle norm of a culture conscious of its reversibilities, one could not insist in assuming all by oneself the univalent role of the *Foreigner*, whether it be positive (a revealer of the tribe's hidden significance) or negative (an intruder who destroys the consensus). The romantic or terroristic seriousness of strangeness in itself becomes dissolved in this glittering polymorphic culture that returns everyone to his or her otherness or foreign status. Nor does such a culture, however, assimilate foreigners; it dissolves their very being as it dissolves the clear-cut boundaries between same and others. Alas, it does not always withstand the dogmatic attempts of those – economically or ideologically disappointed – who restore their "ownness" and "identity" by rejecting others. The fact remains nonetheless that in France such attempts are immediately and more than elsewhere seen as a betrayal of *culture*, as a loss of *spirit*. And even if, at certain times in history, such a healthy cultural reaction tends to be forgotten, one feels like counting on it so as to maintain France as a land of asylum. Not as a house of welcome but as a ground for adventure. There are foreigners who wish to be lost in the perverseness of French culture in order to be reborn not with a new identity but within the enigmatic dimension of human experience that, with and beyond belonging, is called freedom. In French: culture.

During the meetings of the National Assembly between August 20 and August 26, 1789, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* was debated and adopted. Two centuries later, it remains the yet unsurpassed touchstone for those freedoms to be enjoyed by any human being on our planet. One has often admired the conciseness and lucidity of a text that succeeds within a few pages to foresee abuses and threats, and to guarantee the reasoned exercise of freedoms, drawn up in order to affect the existing political institutions, to modify them so that they might show respect for "simple and indisputable principles." Consequently, basing itself on a universal human nature that the Enlightenment learned to conceive and to respect, the *Declaration* shifts from the universal notion – "men" – to the "political associations" that must preserve their rights, and encounters the historical reality of the "essential political association," which turns out to be the *nation*. The national political body

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must act for all.

The progressive and democratic aspect of that principle strikes the commentator and yet questions him. In fact, it is within the once constituted national grouping that all persons can remain free and equal of right. Thus the free and equal man is, *de facto*, the citizen. In Article VI of the *Declaration*, moreover, the term "man" that opened Article I is replaced with "citizen" – the latter being necessarily called for after the overview of the social and national nature of his humanity, which was clarified and gradually introduced by the preceding articles:

> Article VI. The law is the expression of the general will; all citizens have the right to work toward its creation; it must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes.

One will note the talent of the drafters: the word "citizens" appears in a sentence where *rights* turn out to be civic *duties* – citizens will "work toward." And it is on account of this give-and-take of obligations and enjoyments that *man*, having become a *citizen*, will be protected as well as, in case of an offense, punished. The general will specific to the nation, a phrase again borrowed from Rousseau, asserts itself here, including the poor, workers of all stations, sex and age being indifferent . . . Never has democracy been more explicit, for it excludes no one – *except foreigners* . . . .

In fact, "natural" man is immediately *political*, hence *national*. The slippage in the argument was to lead, with the economic development of western societies, to the creation of nation-states and, by derivation or deviation, to the creation of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The spreading of the French Revolution's ideas over the continent triggered the demand for the national rights of peoples, not the universality of mankind. As for the monstrosity of national-socialism, one may wonder if it is merely a deviation or pathological distortion of "normal" nationalism under the pressure of economic developments, or if it is affiliated with traditional nationalism. While emphasizing the break that such a monstrosity represents in political thought and institutions, Hannah Arendt is right in thinking that the national legacy served as a guarantee for Nazi criminality, at the beginning at least; one was thus prevented from detecting crimes against humanity under a terminology whose previous history and tradition one thought familiar. The world of barbarity thus comes to a head in a single world composed of States, in which only those people organized into national residences are entitled

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to have rights. The "loss of residence," a "loss of social framework" worsened by "the impossibility to find one" are characterstic of this new barbarity issued from the very core of the Nation-state system.

The cosmopolitan trend, heir to certain ideas of Montesquieu or Rousseau, was powerful at the beginning of the Revolution and found concrete political fulfilment in many decrees and other judicial actions. Thus Guy Jean-Baptiste Target, a moderate member of the National Assembly, suggested on April 30, 1790 that all foreigners having resided in France for five years and owning some property be naturalized.

Pacifist at the beginning, the Assembly had proclaimed on May 20, 1790 that it would never undertake any conquest nor use force against any people. In that spirit, the support of an international elite for revolutionary ideas could only be applauded. After the abortive flight of the King and the Declaration of Pillnitz by the King of Prussia and the Emperor of Austria and in order to fight the accord of the European monarchies against the revolutionaries, the Girondists chose cosmopolitanism as the trump card in their political battle. They were hoping that the principles of human rights would contaminate neighboring people and incite uprisings against tyrants. Refugees and political exiles were then encouraged, and the Legislative Assembly legalized the formation of foreign legions.

Those policies were not even modified on the eve of the war. Foreigners had never been better treated in France than when the government was getting ready to fight their countries of origin. Thus, on August 24, 1792, a group of men of letters, led by the dramatist Marie-Joseph Chénier, brother of the poet, requested the Legislative Assembly to adopt, as "allies of the French people," a set of foreign writers whose works were already supposed to have abolished "the foundations of tyranny and prepared the way for liberty." To put it plainly, "these benefactors of humanity" were to be elected deputies. For the first time in the history of mankind, a statute of (honorary) integration was voted, which, in the name of human universality, recognized as *French* those who had done the most for mankind.

The course of events, however, particularly the launching of the Revolutionary Wars, did change the climate. Cosmopolitan ideas and their promotion, quite obviously, had not led European countries to line up under the revolutionary banner. As the time of armament arrived, foreigners appeared embarrassing, if not suspicious or guilty. Some foreign groups must have been "infiltrated" by the enemy. On that basis, an overall suspicion spread against all foreigners, to the point of making them liable to be sent to the scaffold, where many of them did perish.

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After the events of May 31st involving a conflict between the National Convention and the Paris Commune, the representatives of the Committee on Public Safety asked that the road to Paris be blocked and suspects be arrested. The National Convention declared: "Foreigners originally from those countries with which the Republic is at war and who had no domicile in France prior to July 14, 1789, will be arrested at once and seals placed on their papers, crates, and belongings." Many foreigners were imprisoned in town houses and requisitioned state buildings. It was proposed that "hospitality certificates" be created, which would be given by municipalities to those foreigners having successfully passed the "civics examination"; they would then wear an armband bearing the name of their country of origin and the word "hospitality." Fabre d'Eglantine laid stress on having all foreigners in France arrested and their possessions confiscated to the benefit of the Republic. A Hébertist asked, to no avail, that an exception be made for political immigrants who had come to defend the cause of liberty.

Two parties appeared to be forming: the Dantonists, who favored increasing harshness in the treatment of foreigners but were in favor of peace; and the Hébertists, who defended the immigrant patriots but pressed for an uncompromising war against Europe. Fabre d'Eglantine was particularly conspicuous in denouncing foreign plots. François Chabot and Claude Basire uncovered a conspiracy. Well-known foreigners were arrested: two Germans, the financier and ex-adviser to the Emperor of Austria Junius Frey, his brother Emmanuel, and their secretary Diedrichsen; two bankers from Brussels, Simon and Doroy as well as four other men who were employed by Hérault de Séchelles and found guilty of being secret agents.

One specific circumstance was injected into this foreigners hunt – a hunt understandable in time of war. Some of the foreigners were dyed-in-the-wool atheists and participated actively, sometimes crudely, in the "dechristianization" drive then in progress. The reactions that their excesses could not fail to provoke led some to believe that the dechristianization movement was a counter-revolutionary scheme. In similar fashion, the ultra-revolutionary retaliations demanded by the Hébertists, the *sans-culotte* followers of *Le Père Duchesne*, divided and decimated Republican ranks while hampering the necessarily mediatory role of the government. "We know of only one way to stop the evil, and that is to sacrifice without pity, on the tomb of the tyrant, all who regret tyranny, all who would be interested in avenging it, all who might have it come to life again among us," Saint-Just asserted in one of those well-turned and contradictory sentences that can lead people to make strange amalgamations. The catch-word "Amalgamate!" has been attributed to him. Ex-

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tremists who were blamed for shortages, instigators of rebellions in prisons, and others were "amalgamated" with foreign agents.

The clubs of foreigners were disbanded. On December 25, 1793, Robespierre, in his *Report on the Principles of Revolutionary Government*, blamed foreigners for all crises. Ultimately, the scaffold took care of the cosmopolitan's lot, while nationalism – perhaps "regretfully" and "reluctantly"—became paramount in both minds and laws. The Committee on Public Safety, after some hesitation, drew up a new law on foreigners on April 25, 1794. All former members of the nobility and foreign subjects were forbidden to stay in Paris, fortified towns, or coastal cities, for the length of the war (exceptions were made for workers in arms factories, foreign wives of patriots, and all those whose services were deemed useful to the the Republic). Former members of the nobility and foreigners were henceforth excluded from people's societies, watch committees, communal or sectional assemblies. Amendments allowed a few exceptions for foreigners in residence for more than twenty years and a few other categories. Consequently, Englishmen were interned and Spaniards were impounded, foreign legions were disbanded, deserters sent to work on farms. All were *excluded from public service and public rights*. Any troublemaking foreigner became suspicious and could be brought before the revolutionary tribunal.

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IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ

On Jacob L. Talmon

Jacob L. Talmon is one of a special group of Central European Jewish intellectuals who have helped define the nature of twentieth-century social and political life, giving shape to destructive potentials of our age only dimly understood by those who worship at the altar of absolute progress. Central neither to class enthusiasms below nor national hubris above, these people were actually outsiders who understood the driving forces of the times – the unitary character of the totalitarian threat, the tragic gap between promise and performance in the revolutionary process, and the failure of internationalist rhetoric to resolve national realities.

These emigrés from Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Budapest and their environs were, for the most part, not speaking and writing from a conservative bias or defending constitutional tradition; there was little to defend in the world of crumbling empires in Central Europe. They were not concerned with restitution or restoration of an old order, for they knew old orders to threaten their own survival as Jews, intellectuals, and cosmopolitans. They were motivated by a passion for economic justice and elementary forms of democratic rule. Their involvement with the socialist dream, minus the maddening character of socialist practice, gave them a special rhetoric.

Among this group were, for instance, Hannah Arendt, Hans J. Morgenthau, Hans Kohn, Franz Neumann, George Lichtheim, Walter Laqueur, Henry Pachter, and Jacob L. Talmon. Talmon, who died in 1980, was the author of many works, among them *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution*, the final volume of a trilogy on two hundred years of political life, begun a quarter of a century ago with *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* and followed by *Political Messianism. The Myth of the Nation*, the most sweeping and ambitious of these volumes, is a masterpiece.

In this work, Talmon brings us to the twentieth century and to its ideological polarization. Less concerned than in the earlier volumes with establishing a tension based on dialectical opposites that are not quite as reified as Talmon imagined – democracy and totalitarianism, or empirical

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politics and messianic relations – he now displays a much greater sensitivity to the wide disparities within the same thinkers, the same nations, and the same classes.

Talmon did not write history in any conventional sense; strictly speaking, he transcended dynastic history and social history. His was a special kind of intellectual history, written by political ideologists who were either politicians or close enough to the political marrow to inform practicing politicians. *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* was peopled with figures of the Enlightenment such as Rousseau, Helvètius, and Diderot, and with great political actors such as Robespierre, Danton, and Saint-Just. *Political Messianism* ranged from technocrats to theocrats, from Saint-Simon to Blanqui, who were both political actors and intellectual leaders. *The Myth of the Nation* included Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, and, in Western Europe, Mussolini and Hitler and their intellectual progenitors. Talmon weaves a tight interchange among social, political, and intellectual events, breaking down conventional distinctions that usually impede rather than enhance a sense of history.

Few genuinely heroic figures appear in Talmon's work, and those who continually announce a utopian future are dealt with severely. That is true for Marx, Engels, and Lenin no less than for Saint-Simon, Babeuf, and Fourier. But there does emerge in *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution* a sense of the political leader as intellectual but not as ideologist. This distinction lends insight into Talmon and his notion of who constitute the political prophets of peace no less than war.

In the figure of Jean Jaurès, the nineteenth-century French socialist, one can sense Talmon's archetype. He describes Jaurès as having had a passion for fairness, an extraordinary poetic capacity for empathy, a marvelous quickness of sympathy and imaginative insight, combined with an unmatched gift for words. Talmon's concerns were those of Jaurès: a life of intellect and politics tempered by a survivalist attitude toward society. Talmon also read into Jaurès what was true of himself: that these very characteristics made him yield easily to inferior men with narrower horizons or limited understanding but greater self-assurance. Fanaticism and dogmatism and not just democratic dogma were the true enemies of both Jaurès and Talmon.

The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution begins with the growing dichotomization of class or nation that took place after the revolutions of 1848. Talmon emphasizes the dilemmas in postutopian socialist thinking on the role of the nation when developing a revolutionary strategy based on pure class assumptions. The work then moves dramatically to Germany under Wilhelm I in the late nineteenth

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century, a world in which the question of emancipating the proletariat is dwarfed by the issue of national destiny. Between 1848 and 1914, Europe was driven by national cohesion more than class emancipation. Whether in Germany or Russia, Talmon saw revolutionary internationalism as a tenuous thread in the face of an overpowering demand for national hegemony and survival.

The section on Austria is another case study of the issue of class or nation, prototypical of what took place in Europe in the rest of the twentieth century. Talmon goes on to tell us that while the Jewish role in European history was hardly new, it became dramatically significant during the early part of the twentieth century with the encounter of the gentile Jew first as a bourgeois adversary and second as a communist enemy. The Jew appeared as the *extremis*, an unstable element in the nationalist equation. The inability of large portions of European society to handle situations in which the Jew became a spokesman for forces contesting each other led to a breakdown of Enlightenment and Romantic rhetoric.

As Jews became archetypes, animosities against them crystallized from both the left and the right. Consequently, they became the enemy for national and class ideologies and interests, a source of tension rather than resolution. And, as extremism became commonplace, Jewish centrism, along with gentile liberalism, became identified as the main foes of the totalitarians.

Next, Talmon analyzes how the dilemma between class and nationality finally was resolved in pre- and postrevolutionary Russian practice, and then demonstrates how the general will of the proletariat was translated by Lenin and Stalin into a particular Russian national will. In the last sections, he points to the alternative fascist-Nazi resolution of class and nation, which emphasized the national question over that of class. The Fascists spotted the weakness in classical Marxism, its denial and denigration of nationalism, and their ideologists proved pivotal in developing a theory of socialism based on ultranationalist considerations. Nationalism, according to Talmon, permitted and even encouraged alliances between communists and fascists, which was what made the clash within Europe inevitable.

Finally, Talmon takes up post-World War Two problems. He does it tentatively. The themes of third world development and modernization are clearly beyond the ken of his worldview. He asks: What is the role of Western democratic forms with respect to third world demands for political equality? What is the place of the Soviet Union as midwife to national liberation movements and new totalitarian systems? What military formations are taking place in the third world? What are the

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inner tensions within energy-rich and food-poor developing areas? The strictly European context of his thought offered few clues, much less firm answers.

Talmon's last work projects a feeling that a new world is unfolding, a world unfamiliar to him and his European colleagues. In that sense, *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution* is a fitting conclusion not only to a personal career of outstanding brilliance but also to the end of a social epoch, one in which the European sensibility could still impose cultural order upon social chaos. Talmon understood that his epoch began with the demands of the French Revolution for both a revolutionary process and democratic goals implemented from above. Europe became a center of political, social, and economic experimentation, where new social classes first tested Europe's commitment to transnational economic involvements in contrast to strictly national political goals, and where nations then destroyed visions of class solidarity and human brotherhood and, in doing so, deprived Europe of the opportunity to fulfill its highest and noblest dreams.

Whatever one thinks about Talmon's treatment of particular themes, he provides remarkable insights into an era of European preeminence that no longer exists, and that can no longer determine the fate of worlds. Yet, we may still learn from the continuing emotional tug of pan-Europeanism in the latter portion of the twentieth century – about the value of pluralism and survival in the face of national struggles that seem insuperable and unending.

That the price of the pacification of Europe proved so high and exacted a toll in millions of lives can be reflected upon only with a deep sense of tragedy. Still, a sense of triumph emerges from under the rubble. Talmon's trilogy informs us of the high risks of all forms of fanaticism. Perhaps the non-European world will profit by these lessons. But, as Talmon makes perfectly clear, the chances seem slim given the imperviousness of new nations to the history of older ones.

Talmon demonstrated to the squirming discomfort of many other historians that the familiar and easy contrasts of reaction and revolution made little sense. In fact, the totalitarian drive to destroy the old order, to replace tradition with modernity, was the work of a similar mind-set. The futurism of a Mussolini or the prole-cultism of a Stalin has the same source: a belief in the need to start the world anew. And this impulse was itself anything but new. The French Revolution, with its Robespierrist insistence on a new art, a new politics, a new calendar, announced a modernity seriously impaired from the outset, severed from any historical moorings. For Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* arose from the wellsprings of an impatient reformist impulse,

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matched by a certitude that political leadership could feel the pulse of a people and regulate the springs of social change. The revolutionaries were the patients in need of healing. Together they would move toward the utopian future in lockstep. This was a dream that turned into the nightmare of terror, or into bad medicine. But it also was a dream that persisted beyond the terror to the utopian thought of the early nineteenth century.

In *Political Messianism*, Talmon gets into the discussions of the early part of the nineteenth century, when romanticism flourished in art and music and hence invited mannerism and exaggeration in politics – always in the name of the good heart. The world of Fourier and Saint-Simon and utopian socialism is seen by Talmon as little more than a benign version of the revolutionaries who came to purify French life fifty years earlier. Utopianism provided a gloss that permitted the messianists to work in a far more tolerant period; and hence less subject to the exaggerations of cruel terror and overt assassination in the name of the anti-Christ as typified by the extreme elements in the French Revolution.

Even though *Political Messianism* was by far a more thoughtful and persuasive work than *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, it was received without fanfare and without favor. Talmon himself thought that the negative reception was due to the radical fervor of the Generation of 1968 – an explanation which, I believe, credits the *zeitgeist* with more than it is entitled to. My own feeling is that the second volume was more severe in its implications, since it in effect says that the utopianism with a human face, no less than the earlier revolution of a heartless sort, ends up in the same quagmire of bad thinking and fanatic action. In any event, Talmon recognized the vast continuities between the French and Russian Revolutions; he understood the identical theoretical wellsprings of a democratic theory that ended in undemocratic practices; he saw how national liberation efforts sweep away claims about international and transnational claims of universal brotherhood; and he noted the final irony of the century which was also the final answer to despotism: the revolt of the peoples of Europe and Asia to rid themselves of saviors turned despots. The great schism within revolutionary movements was the struggle between communism and fascism, which then pitted the supposed internationalism of the former against the nationalism of the latter. Talmon shrewdly understood that there was something chimeric about the mutually exclusive claims of proletarian internationalism and national socialism, that the communist and fascist movements shared a "bastard synthesis" of nationalism and internationalism.

The totalitarian ideologies shared a Manichean view of history, possessed an all-embracing sense of truth and healing, never admitted to a

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middle ground. Consequently, no form of collusion between fascism and communism could be permanent. What they shared in common ideology made for a deadly rivalry in military terms. Jacob Talmon shared this special appreciation of the unitary character of twentieth-century totalitarianism with Hannah Arendt; he arrived at it from a study of the French case and she did via the German one. Both understood that the ultimate struggle of the century remained the same as in past centuries; between totalitarianism writ large and various forms of democracy; between the revolutionary powers of people and the received wisdom of God; and between collective will and individual conscience.

Talmon's last book is a work of irony ending in a "thesis" that itself is a paradox: mutually incompatible claims shoved down the throats of an unhappy and unwilling humanity. In this sense, the struggles of the century do not end with the completion of the century. Only the forms change. Like the century itself, Talmon ends neither on a note of triumph nor of despair, but on a call for further vigil and better sense. Implicitly, he calls for myths to be countered by facts, vision to be overcome by insight, and passion to be beaten back by compassion. In the earlier volumes of his famed trilogy, the Jewish Question is strangely muted. But in *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution*, the question of the Jews and the Holocaust is central. With anti-Semitism the official policy of Stalin and the Gulag, and the Holocaust Hitler's final solution, Talmon asks why the Jewish communities were so divided on the nature of their tormentors, why some were willing to entertain their own spiritual extermination in favor of a set of higher ideological truths. In many ways, his subtext is the Jewish Question. His own deep-seated revulsion for both universal and national varieties of totalitarianism stems from a troubled appreciation that the Jewish people, like the black people in America to whom he alludes, are both victims and agents of chiliastic appeals. If the emphasis on the Jewish Question is more on the Soviet variety than the Nazi one, it is because the Soviet treatment, in its very ambiguity, illustrates the larger themes of the century: participants in self-destruction through political myth no less than victims of destruction through holistic visions. Thus Talmon's last book is unique, among those attempting to survey the century, in its frank analysis of the place of the Holocaust. In one of her final articles, the late Lucy S. Dawidowicz asks how students who are unfamiliar with the biblical revulsion against murder as the primordial crime can grasp the horror of the Holocaust; how they can understand the evil that is the murder of the European Jews, if they are not taught that all cultures abhor premeditated murder as the most heinous of all crimes. These concerns are central to Talmon's *lebenswerke* as well. He remains quite unsurpassed as a scholar of our age.

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PAUL HOLLANDER

The End of Communism?

The recent collapse of communist states provides an unsurpassed opportunity to recall how long and tenacious the Western misperceptions of these systems had been, how confidently misjudgments were paraded, and how much resistance against revising these misconceptions still remains. This is an especially good time to ponder once more the relationship between theory and practice, that is, between the ideas and ideals of Marxism and the character of societies which were allegedly guided by or fashioned on behalf of, or in conjunction with, these ideals – in short, the relationship between "existing socialism" (the communist states in Eastern Europe and elsewhere) and the ideals of socialism.

Did communist practices merely give a bad name to socialist ideals (as some maintain) or were the ideals themselves defective or inherently difficult to realize? At last the collapse and total delegitimation of communist systems also invites reexamination of the long-standing dispute in the West, and especially in the United States, between those who have been unembarrassed critics of communism and those who brought us anti-anticommunism.

Let me say something first about the reactions of the card-carrying anticommunists, conservatives, and neoconservatives to the decline of communist systems. Their aversion to these systems has been further validated by the new revelations following the reestablishment of free expression in Eastern Europe; we now have more evidence than ever about the specifics of political crimes and repression perpetrated by these systems (along with upwardly revised figures of the number of their victims); we have more inside information about lies routinely disseminated by their agitprop machinery; there is new, more detailed knowledge of their unsolved social problems and unsurpassed record of environmental degradation; there is even new revelation of the assistance (for long doubted by many in the West) these governments gave Western and Arab terrorist groups. Most importantly anticommunism has also been fully vindicated by the massive rejection of these systems by their own people and by the fresh evidence indicating not only their ruthlessness but also their inefficiency and inability to satisfy basic and modest material and

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human needs.

American and Western anticommunists (myself included) were wrong only in one important respect: they attributed more strength and staying power to these systems than they actually possessed. They credited their leaders with a stronger grip on power; they thought their peoples more docile, helpless or intimidated than was actually the case. Perhaps this had something to do with the totalitarian model (which I also regarded useful for understanding these systems through much of their existence) or simply with lack of imagination. In any event nobody in the West had anticipated the rapid unraveling of these systems – it was not a singular failing of their anticommunist critics. On the other hand this unraveling does not justify the retroactive claim that these systems, and the Soviet Union in particular, have *never* represented a threat to the West or the United States, that Soviet aggression was a cold-war myth invented by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the military-industrial complex.

At the same time I am not sure how much the military build-up of the Reagan administration and its support for anticommunist guerillas hastened the decay of the Soviet Empire, as is often claimed by conservatives. The Soviet Union shouldered huge military burdens throughout its existence, and its leaders did not flinch from imposing the attendant hardships on their people. Afghanistan was more important, and without American help the guerillas would not have inflicted significant losses on the Soviet forces; in turn the failure to impose a military solution in Afghanistan was a notable factor in Soviet demoralization, both a cause and symptom of the loss of political will.

I do not believe that a more accommodationist American policy – such as was incessantly recommended by the liberal-left and the peace movement – would have been helpful in reducing Soviet expansionism, let alone would have contributed to domestic liberalization. (For example, not installing intermediate missiles in Western Europe was such a key demand; for others even Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were unwise "irritants" in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union.) Today everyone agrees that the domestic changes in the Soviet Union came about under the pressure of immense economic problems and not because of a sense of political security and material well-being that many Western sources stipulated as the only basis of democratization.

Much as I rejoice in the failures of communism, I find the "end-of-history" viewpoint also bizarre; I believe that while Western pluralistic political sysems, and in a large measure contemporary capitalism too, have been vindicated, we have no idea what the future will bring and no

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assurance that other, new varieties of authoritarian beliefs, movements, or political systems will not emerge.

Perhaps the most interesting reactions to the failure of communist systems are coming from those for whom these developments should have provided an especially rewarding occasion for informed self-examination – those on the left, who for decades have given every benefit of doubt to political systems claiming socialist credentials and vigorously disputed (or muted) the critical assessments of these systems. We might designate this sizeable and vocal group as the professional anti-anticommunists, influential since the late 1960s and nourished by the lasting discredit Senator McCarthy brought to outspoken anticommunism. They are mostly intellectuals and other educated groups, brought together by their aversion to American culture, the American political system, and American capitalism, as well as by their belief that no other society can match the corruptions of this one. These views have been most visibly and vocally expressed on our elite campuses and adjacent enclaves.

Anti-anticommunists, radical leftists, and left-liberals responded in a rather predictable way to the collapse of "existing socialist systems" in Eastern Europe and Nicaragua. Their responses confirm once more that groups and individuals do not surrender lightly the beliefs which provide them with a sense of identity, meaning, communal ties, and the underpinnings of a moral universe. If, in addition, the public and private embrace of these beliefs also helps to make a living – as it has for many in the flourishing social criticism industry (in academia, the mass media, publishing, and so on) – there are still more substantial reasons for clinging to them.

We can better understand these attitudes by recalling that – besides the increasingly reflexive rejection of American society—the other centerpiece of this adversarial outlook has been a belief in some sort of socialism or "socialist alternative," often informed by what I have called elsewhere a "god-seeking Marxism." (I will not attempt here to improve on the insights into the religious functions and dimensions of Marxism provided by Raymond Aron and Leszek Kolakowski.) These beliefs survived notwithstanding the difficulty of finding countries which lived up to the hopes of those in the West waiting for the arrival of authentic socialism, who from time to time thought that it had finally materialized (first in the Soviet Union, then in China, Cuba, Vietnam, or in the undifferentiated wonderland of the third world, and finally in Nicaragua), only to turn away, sooner or later, in disappointment from these flesh and blood incarnations of the ideal.

Still, the desire for a "socialist alternative" (to the corruption, injustice, and inhumanity of Western capitalist systems) persisted. Although

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the political systems now utterly discredited and collapsing in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have not been greatly admired by the critics of Western societies since the death of Stalin, they were not subjected to the type of searching and merciless criticism these critics so eagerly aimed at their own social systems. After all, these systems expunged capitalism.

The American (and Western) critics of capitalism could not quite believe that Soviet-type systems were totally lacking in legitimacy among their own people; they subscribed to the belief that while they did not excel in the provision of political liberties, they did provide their people with material security and a commendably egalitarian income distribution. The critics of the West did not know or found it difficult to believe that these socialist countries developed new forms of inequality which became deeply entrenched and that they were also riddled with social problems identical or very similar to those found in the decadent West. As far as the Soviet Union was concerned, its deficiencies were often ascribed to and excused by American intrigues, the arms race, a troubled history, and so on.

Thus certain illusions about these systems persisted even after they were no longer revered; the Western (and especially the more radical) left never really took their full measure because it was never much interested in them and their defects. Social democrats were the major exception; they remained unrepentant critics of communist systems at a time (between the late 1960s and throughout the 1980s) when anti-anticommunism was the proper attitude among people who thought of themselves as enlightened liberals.

It should be emphasized that those of left and left-liberal persuasion had ample opportunities to rethink their beliefs regarding "existing socialist systems" well before their recent collapse – but they were not terribly interested in those in Eastern Europe. They preferred the newer socialist states in the third world which more readily gratified their longings for some uncorrupted, harmonious, preindustrial realm, populated by poor but pure, happy and unpossessive peasants thriving on authentic communal bonds. But then the supply of such countries began to run out as their images became tarnished: Cuba persecuted homosexuals, China was receptive to capitalism (and massacred students on television), Vietnam presided over the flight of the boatpeople. Nicaragua through the 1980s inspired great hopes but that too came to an end when in 1990 its benighted masses "voted with their bellies and not with their hearts" (in the words of William Sloan Coffin) – as the event came to be described among erstwhile supporters. At last came the spectacular collapse of the East European communist states and the accelarating change

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(and decay) in the Soviet Union.

The adversarial (or radical) left could not ignore the demise of existing socialist (or communist) systems because of its justified apprehension that their collapse could be used to enhance the legitimacy of the United States, capitalism, or Western culture, and to vindicate anticommunism – the most troubling prospect for the upholders of anti-anticommunism. So the battle was joined not merely by the contributors to *The Nation* or *The Village Voice* and many "alternative" publications, but also by many academic Marxists, well-known *New York Times* columnists and various op-ed page authors seeking to minimize the damage to anti-anticommunism.

Several approaches and arguments emerged in these apologetics and rationalizations, designed to salvage deeply-held beliefs threatened by the new developments. One recurring theme has been that whatever happened in Eastern Europe proves nothing about the ills and evils of capitalism and American society or should be understood to suggest that Western systems are in any way morally superior to communist ones. Often each new revelation of the misdeeds or failures of communist systems was instantly paired with some allegedly similar American vice or flaw. The improvements associated with *glasnost* came to be used to highlight the lack of change or reform in the United States. We have been inundated with warnings against American (or Western) self-righteousness and gloating and reminders of how many things are wrong with American (Western, capitalist) systems. Those particularly energetic or imaginative in this salvaging enterprise have insisted that developments in Eastern Europe merely show that Stalinism but not authentic Marxian socialism was rejected. When in the autumn of 1989 East Germans began to pour out in record numbers, an editorial in *The Nation* seriously suggested that this merely represented their going "from Stalin back to Marx" – the evidence being their choice of West Germany over Thatcher's England or "aprés-Reagan America"! It also has been proposed that even if it were true that East Europeans actually preferred capitalism to socialism, this may be a short-lived aberration, a form of false consciousness, or (as a British writer put it) manifestation of being "besotted with consumerist glitz"; or as an American kindred spirit observed (in the context of Nicaragua), "A few Nicaraguans will again enjoy the freedom of the shopping mall."

Much energy has been invested in claiming that no matter what happened in Eastern Europe (or the Soviet Union, Nicaragua, Mongolia, and so on), it had no relevance whatsoever to the riches and inspiring qualities of Marxist theory, since the systems in question had nothing to do with Marxism. Actually the Western left for some time has been di-

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vided on this matter; there have been many who took the above position while others thought that these systems at least tried to implement or apply Marxism, or parts of it (often under difficult conditions as in the Soviet Union, China, or Cuba), for which they should be given some credit. The currently popular argument – rapidly approaching the status of conventional wisdom – that these systems had nothing whatsoever to do with Marxism is, however, not tenable. While the gap between theory and practice has always been deep, this has more to do with *the intended and hoped for results* of particular policies and institutional transformations derived from the *theory*, than with the distance between the policies themselves and the theory. The issue was aptly summarized well before the recent events, by three authors by no means unsympathetic to Marxism – Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller, and Gyorgy Markus: ". . . since socialism does not exist except as the sum of its historically existing varieties, nineteenth and early twentieth century socialist doctrines are at least co-responsible for the 'real socialism' of today, even if we reassert . . . that the upshot is not socialism in any meaningful and acceptable sense of the term."

Let me note a few matters which suggest that Marxist theory and the communist practices had *something* to do with one another, that the theory/practice divergence was far from total: Most communist leaders – Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Castro as well as lesser figures – invested a great deal of energy in the study and theoretical development of Marxism (never mind the results) and gave many indications of being inspired and motivated by it; they found these ideas eminently suitable for legitimating their policies. The populations under their rule were compelled to familiarize themselves with Marxism or large chunks of it, and a vital core of Marxism, anticapitalism (or hostility to private enterprise), was institutionalized in all these systems. The means of production were taken out of private hands; central planning was established; antireligious consciousness-raising campaigns were introduced, and institutional religion curtailed. The personal intolerance of Marx found institutionalized expression in political intolerance, and Marx's hostility to peasants became official policy. The political systems inspired by Marxism also absorbed the collectivistic ethos which pervades Marxism and which had an affinity with the authoritarian practices undertaken in its name. In brief, as David Horowtiz put it recently, Marxist ideas and prescriptions exercised a "gravitational pull" on these systems. The salvage operation regarding the responsibility of Marxist theory for Marxist-Leninist (Stalinist, Maoist, and other) practices is also undertaken by focusing attention on the most general, humanitarian aspects and messages of Marxism (that is, the early Marx) the furthest removed from any application.

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It is particularly important to address the parallel often drawn these days between Christianity and Marxism and the associated rhetorical question: should we also discard Christianity because of the Inquisition, corrupt popes, and other unappealing practices which were linked to it, or legitimated by it? Reject Christian values because of the small number of true Christians among us? But Christianity (and its various incarnations) did not make the same inordinate demands on human lives and social arrangements, nor did it seek to overcome (except on rare historical occasions) the division between the private and public realm; nor did these beliefs (obviously) claim to be scientific truths. And while religious intolerance too has been the source of conflict, bloodshed, and repression, Christianity did not inspire or legitimate slaughter and enslavement on a scale comparable to those communist systems perpetrated. After all, a good deal of Christianity devalued existence here and now, hence its involvement with transforming life on this earth – its involvement with "theory and practice" – was inherently more limited, as was therefore its capacity to do damage. (Another difference of lesser moral importance: Christianity, unlike Marxism, inspired a vast amount of good art and music; it has also inspired enduring forms of charity and service to existing human beings, rather than to abstractions.) Also of some interest and relevance, as we pursue these parallels, unlike Marxism, Christianity has provided a sustaining worldview for hundreds of millions of people; Marxism and its varieties nourished intermittently small, elite groups, more often than not legitimating their power drives.

The argument that communist practices discredited praiseworthy socialist ideals also has been advanced by people who are not Marxists. But what precisely is the socialism that communism – the attempted applications of Marxism – besmirched? Here the responses may divide between those who might point to Scandinavian countries as existing examples of a humane socialism and those who admit that socialism has not had so far any authentic or appealing incarnation but argue that this need not mean that we give up on awaiting or seeking its arrival. For the latter group "socialism" has become something of a code word for good intentions, decency, caring, a generalized affirmation of social justice, humane welfare-state policies, respect for a wide range of individual rights – values and policies not especially distinctive and already discernible in a number of Western societies which are more capitalistic than not.

Recent reflections of a Polish writer, Jerzy Surdykowski, suggest that those who had witnessed the attempts to realize socialism are less than sanguine about it *even as an ideal*. He wrote:

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> the most dangerous myth of the left, especially the communist left, and one that it shares with many who are by no means leftists [is]: the desire to construct on earth an ideal state, one of the oldest dreams of humanity. . . .
>
> Some socialists who consider themselves democratic and antitotalitarian have also become 'enchanted with Plato' by nurturing hopes for a 'better kind of socialism.' No one has ever succeeded in constructing a system that would both deserve this name and give people at least a little more spiritual satisfaction and material prosperity than any other system . . . Today when many people are searching for a 'third way,' a self-governing republic,' or similar constructs formulated under the slogan of 'the democratic left,' they are too echoing, however faintly, Plato. . . .
>
> . . . If socialism . . . does not contain within itself a gnostic faith in the inevitability of a Brave New World, if it does not promise all other kinds of happiness, what is left?
>
> . . . the notion of a socialist system or even socialist ideology is simply an illusion.

It may also be noted here that the most left-wing social critics in the United States have shown little interest in or enthusiasm for the Scandinavian systems, while they readily conferred the "socialist" title upon an impressive number of one-party dictatorships in the third world, which legitimated themselves with some variety of Marxism-Leninism but failed to provide their people either with political rights or material-economic gains.

The Nicaraguan election was the last straw for the American left, far more devastating than the events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Nicaragua was for a decade the new hope and the most cherished setting for those anxiously waiting for the emergence of an inspiring socialist system. While its collapse was blamed on the United States (economic blockade, support for the *contras*, false promises of economic assistance if the opposition won), the popular rejection of the system removed the country from the itinerary of those who had difficulty rejecting the United States without being able to project their longings on an existing redemptive political system. That these attitudes had a utopian or quasi-utopian flavor is also suggested by the fact that according to recent reports the most committed supporters, who used to live and work in Nicaragua, are abandoning it. They do so not because the new government is expelling them, or because there is no longer need to help Nicaraguans to harvest coffee beans, dig wells, or build rural clinics and schools. "The concept of construction brigade lost its flair" is how a former volunteer put it. According to a coordinator of the Witness for

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Peace Delegations, "Folks are finding themselves moving to other countries where there is a lot of conflict, like the Middle East and South Africa." If so, the impulse to help Nicaragua and its people had more to do with the mystique of participating in the (presumed) redemptive revolutionary transformation of a society and the excitement generated by it, than with helping flesh and blood human beings in their prosaic day-to-day existence.

I think that one effect of the events here discussed on the American (and Western) left and especially the radical left will be a further intensification of social criticism aimed at the United States, as if to confirm the claim that just because putative socialist systems failed, the United States or capitalism does not have a moral edge over them, or over the unfulfilled ideals of socialism. I believe that this trend has been with us since the early 1980s, stimulated in part by the anger and frustration the Reagan presidency had created in these circles.

Support for the African National Congress will remain on the agenda (and the corresponding demands for divestment); sympathy and support for the communist guerillas in El Salvador (and the associated criticism of United States foreign policy) will also persist; the overextended and disfigured concept of "racism" will continue to be used as perhaps the single most devastating (and intimidating) critique of American society (and of particular individuals); other critiques in part modeled after attributions of racism (and perhaps also stimulated by the institutionalized rewards provided to its real or putative victims) will continue to be voiced by other certified victims groups – feminists, homosexuals, AIDs victims, and their more privileged supporters and advocates, and others.

American society will continue to inspire and nurture a vast array of discontents and frustrations which will be blamed either on capitalism or on the more unique deformities of American culture. In doing so, the critics will persist in confusing the sources of their discontent which are stimulated by capitalism (or American social institutions) with those which are rooted in the far more general afflictions of modernity, including freedom, individualism, and affluence, all of which are at once intensely desired and bitterly denounced.

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POEMS

ALEKSANDR KUSHNER

Cypress

For this, as well, I love black cypress; and I love
it also for this, as well: that is, for blackness,
for being darkest of all things here. One drooping tuft
hangs, peering from its great height, abandoned, feckless.

I love black cypress for this, as well: that it combs back
its stiff and wiry locks, the needles of the cypress;
for this: that on recalling a cypress chest, I catch
the scent of sleepless poems broken in to triptychs.

Those sheets of paper in the stuffy, resinous air.
All through life to fight insomnia and suffocation.
What does the cypress see? A ship on water where
the great wave spires in foamy curls, where wave crests glisten.

We're destined for eternity in this life on earth,
as though in one life ten could be accommodated.
But the endless ends; no matter how familiar
it is, sometimes it lets the night outweigh it.

I love black cypress for this, as well: that, having carved
out creaking stretchers from the wood, people bring them
to bear the sleeping ones back to the ship through the dark,
and black earth burns the occiput as if dreams linger.

Farewell! may you wake in another land, mysterious,
where drought and dust never assault the cypress needles.
For this, as well, I love black cypress: that the best
of obelisks to raise over the dead is a cypress seedling.

Editor's Note: "Cypress" is a selection from *Apollo in the Snow* by Aleksandr Kushner, to be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Translation © 1991 by Paul Graves and Carol Ueland. All rights reserved.

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A. R. AMMONS

Museums

The brook, running dry, will stop running when it's dry:
(it worms now like a lost line down the slate roughs
and drops) but it wrestles bank stones harshly after

downpours: slowed, it fills skinny dusk mirrors
with overhangs of branches that shade through
the stone bed into sky: the brook doesn't represent

beauty: it tears off a piece of shore moss, the soggy, threaded
bottom dangling in a strip: it sorts spill down ledges,
wears what it wears away, arcs in clear fangs or, skimming,

idles scum-floats: it doesn't fall apart representing
style: it means nothing but a sum of forces reacting
along a line to a sum of forces from whose sums the mind

makes up a day's subtractions, recollections: nothing
keeps it or wraps or hangs it up: but keep this
poem, a reminder not of keeping but of not keeping.

Time Being

Fate is a reading on what-is, merely,
a shadowy side of what-is, where
definition firms toward
an end that closes then gives up
the form that was its currency:

what-is does not assume
direction, respond to local
time, or take sharp shape: spirit-like,
it is neither young nor
old: it is come into and

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dwelt in when the shabby clutter
of the self strung on brilliant
and dark sequences
is given over and the self gives
up and up to the one eternal

known, since the eternal, eternal,
can't break down into knowledge
of itself, the mortal also lost
from the knowledge of itself,
being then where being is:

apart from that eternity what
eternity is there for the self, oh,
none: when terror
turns to love, the deepest
beholding, oblivion looks

like paradise, the whole place
not at all imagination's work
but a real land we enter when
kissing the world goodbye we kiss
the brow love needs no lips to kiss.

VICKI HEARNE

Comparative Enormity

Once the Pacific grabbed me out
From an idle swim, and in that unutterable

I learned that you can't curse
The ocean when you need to. Compare: Language

(In which we are like marine fish,

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Metabolism right for the brine, and gills)

Is not like the Pacific but moves to
Our outrage, shapes love even

On a rough tongue, sings us
To fine distractions when the waves

Are calm enough. May words evermore be
Only that enormous.

Fireplaces and Sailboats

Next time we build, we say,
the fire will burn

steady accomplishment one end
to the other, waste

prevented if we are,
careful because a fire

is a lot
of things of passage, conservings

so long as it glows
and our sails

never let the breeze
slip by. Timing

is not everything
but time

frames us because
we let it while the gulls

don't even ration joy,
have enough flight, are

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MELISSA GREEN

from Akeldama

Her shadow like a spider crept along the wall
into her woolen sleeve, and crawling crabwise
then contrived a nest and sank into the breast
of Heloise to gnaw her health away.
She whitened like a Korae on the Parthenon.
Now death has put a thumbprint on my brow.
It burns, like any brand of slavery.
I wait, not for a tête-a-tête with God
but for the day when *my* shadow will rise up
and lie across my flesh, embracing me,
until my soul, uncomforted, can't bear
the weight of so much nothingness, and dies.
My eyes are stinging now, as if the sands
of Egypt had been blown there by some storm.
I want to pray. The way she taught me, hands
together on my lips, but Christ, the words
refuse to leave my throat, they're choking me.
Quadrigesima means forty days
abandoned in the desert. Help me pray.
The limner's prayer is wormwood in my mouth.

Bless this awkward chronicle, O Lord.
Illuminate my heart and guide my hand.
Cast off Your smallest boat, so long belayed.
Hurl me up from where my wrists are chained.
Breathe upon my face – this flame, the wax,
a moth of prayer that's singed upon my lips –
for I'm the candle's fire and the wick's
translucent flesh, its penitential leap
toward glory. Sear my sinful heart. Consume
its embered doubt. My savage spirit knows
that *this* is death, both bed and board the same,
a cornucopia of bitterness.
Not You but Satan taught my cell to spawn
such darkness. All eternity is here:

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a filthy pallet propping up my spine
where fleas infest my hair, my robe, the hour,
and stalled above me like a rutting ox,
his nuncio, despair, with thrust and burn,
engendering in me a bloody styx
whose bastard, melancholy, must be born.
Direct Your drifting child who rows alone.
This quill I cling to like an oar will shear
a sea of vellum, break in crested lines
which sink to foam and whisper on the shore.
I steer by night *The Hope of Hope*, a buoy
nestled near the waning Lenten moon.
Where is the other coast? If blessed be
the weak, the poor-in-spirit, they that mourn,
raise up Clothilde. With ebony on cream,
the taste of salt and wormwood in my mouth,
Lord, let me tongue this holy leavened crumb
of art, sustained by history and myth.

FORREST GANDER

The Provinces of Mars

from *Wild Psalms*

I ordered this blue paper from a catalogue
from Barcelona. Do my words get crookeder?
So they do. All I have eaten
since Saturday is malt liquor
which imparts an omnigenous sympathy
and makes me blind as William Tell.
I have been listening to opera.
The soul is a kind of sound: Maria Meneghini
Callas, *ava dolce e serena che regnavi . . .*
in gioia pura. And after Dame
Joan Sutherland first heard Callas sing

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of things past, perdu,
lost. Where are you Cora. There
are wide ice fronds at the bedroom windows,
a different paleontology for each pane.
I am unmanned without you
in this inconsonant dark.

FROM THE /XAM (SOUTHERN CAPE BUSHMEN)

Rain in a Dead Man's Footsteps

When a person dies
a rain starts falling,
filling, erasing his living footsteps,
filling the hollows
of a dead man's footsteps
so the footsteps themselves
will no longer be there.
When we have put
him into the ground,
put him down into his grave,
the rain comes to wash
his footsteps' hollows;
all trace is erased
of the spoor that we knew.
Even when
we have not yet covered
the grave with cut bushes,
before we have piled
stones on cut bushes
(so the bushes themselves
will not lie there naked),
A rain starts falling,
filling his footsteps;
there is rain erasing
the footsteps that were his,

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rainwater destroys
that by which he was known,
there is rain
in a dead man's footsteps.

Translated by Stephen Watson*

IRVING FELDMAN

In Theme Park America,

the mugger raises up his hand
for no reason

in theme park america
every tree is a museum
every leaf a monument
each flower a flower idea
this slum a garden of garbages
the world a world still swelling with

its first inhalation of eternity

everything is larger farther apart
the squalor spacious clearer

---

*Translator's Note: This translation is based on the /Xam texts originally transcribed by W. H. Bleek and Lucy Lloyd in Mowbray, Cape Town, South Africa, in the 1870s, now in the archives of the University of Cape Town. Aware that the /Xam and their culture were being exterminated from the part of the northwestern Cape that was their last refuge, Bleek conducted extensive interviews with the /Xam, in particular with three bushmen who lived with him for several years, before returning to their ancestral lands in the Kenhardt district of the northwestern Cape. Bleek's work was carried on after his death by Lucy Lloyd, who saw to the eventual publication of *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911) in which literal versions of the poems appeared.

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composing a picture of squalor
misery is misery with the pure glow
of something like forever

by whose mild light we see a gleam
sharpen in the killer's fist

look the other one twists away
for our information
those wide startled eyes
are for our information
for our information
he is screaming
can you hear what he's saying
he isn't saying anything
he's just screaming
so that's how it's done how it happens

it's interesting

he's not screaming now
he's doubled over

and we don't have to worry
what it means
nothing is supposed to mean
that will come later
when there's more information
about the information

and so we walk around
in families and couples in shorts
and jeans and t-shirts and sneakers
solemn and docile
eating our ice cream

because everything depends
on going through these motions
the whole fragile revelation

once
we worried sweated I worried

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once a black revolving thunderhead
opaque enormous glob of clenched fists
of motives and intentions
wanting wanting wanting wanting
each hidden behind every other
battering to get out
demanding to be imagined

it hurt unbelievably
it was horrible
that everything wasn't what it seemed
promises broken things blocking the light

we didn't deserve that not us
we were still good
in spite of everything

all that's history
a long eyeblink ago
then america became
theme park america

every tree is a museum
every leaf a monument
each flower a flower idea

who would have dreamt
a miracle could be so
easy

everything is so simple
so transparent
one intention smiles from every face
to be pleasant and to please
to please for example *us*

who simplify ourselves
to receive simply gratefully

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what brilliant good people who have
the franchise on reality
thought up and made for us
this wonderful truly wonderful
and give us our role to play too
we please by being pleased

and showing it

addict
batterer
suicide
insomniac
senator
mugger
drunk
the baby with the cigarette burns

wherever in this great park

look at that one
look there
look over there
how amazingly like themselves

nothing has changed
and everything is different

and let's face it
no one *needs* poverty anymore
it's not *doing* anything
we don't need these poor people
so it's very nice
if they're kept on as the poor

things our eyes say
when we pass in the street

I mean we're poor too
we're visitors ourselves

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look at all we gave up to be here
we have nothing but our wonderful faith
in all this wonderful
truly wonderful
we're doing the best we can

and because behind the scenes
another hand
is moving the mugger's hand
it doesn't hang baffled in the bright air
it's doing it

right now
right there
across the street

and later maybe we'll know *why*
our wounds our woundedness so deep
they keep crying out for some eternity
right now

we never
not us
oh no

every tree
every leaf
each flower
a flower

look look he's gasping
look he's looking over here
don't look
look on the ground collapsed
he looks awful
like a messed up balloon
look at the mugger he's crouching
he's feeling around in his pockets
I think he's smiling at us he's showing
it's terrible it's interesting it's nice
it's not dangerous
in theme park america

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we're grinning we're
grinning back

look at that blue sky
it's a perfect day
it's perfect here alright

if only the whole world
if everyone everywhere
could see us
see how good we are
truly good
they would be happy
they would want to be good

please god let's not blow it
again
let it stay like this
forever

oh did we see this one before
it looks familiar
I don't remember
I bet you he gets up and walks away

please move over I can't see

the knife the knife again
plunging
for no reason
but no it will not rend no
it will miss entirely

the innocence of everything

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STEPHEN MILLER

Materialism and Its Discontents

Materialism has virtually no defenders. The latest edition of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* offers the following remark made about materialism by one Arthur Charles Erickson in 1973: "North American civilization is one of the ugliest to have emerged in world history . . . [because] its inveterate materialism . . . has become the model for cultures around the globe." If the United States has often been accused of being a materialistic civilization, the Reagan administration was especially attacked on these grounds – so much so, it would seem, that in his inaugural address George Bush felt the need to distance himself from the supposed materialism of his predecessor. For Bush asked: "Are we enthralled with material things. . . ?" The implication was: Not me, not my presidency.

The bow in the direction of antimaterialism was applauded by a writer in *The New Republic*, who called the paragraph that included this remark "Bush's best paragraph." Moreover, that same week materialism was attacked in *The New York Review of Books*; Robert Craft ended an essay on Albert Einstein by citing what he called "an arresting remark" Einstein made in 1936. Einstein said that "the intellectual decline brought on by a shallow materialism is a far greater menace to the survival of Jewry than numerous external foes who threaten its existence with violence." Attacking the shallow materialism of Jews, Einstein unfortunately was rehearsing the standard line of rabid anti-Semites. More often than not antimaterialism has been a dark and sinister force in the last two hundred years – in large part because it has gone hand in hand with anti-Semitism. As Fritz Stern put it, describing the climate of opinion in late-nineteenth-century Germany, Jews were considered "a race that for long had been suspected of being uniquely gifted in the materialistic, that is, evil pursuits."

But what is materialism? It is a difficult "ism" to define, for in the last two hundred years it has come to refer to several different but related notions. In common contemporary usage, materialism – usually preceded by the adjectives "vulgar" or "shallow" – means, as the *American Heritage Dictionary* would have it, "undue regard for worldly concerns." When

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we call someone materialistic, we mean they are excessively devoted to getting and spending, to acquiring things. This, however, is a relatively late usage, one that became commonplace only after the mid-nineteenth century.

This notion of materialism, which I'll call ordinary materialism, carries a good deal of emotional weight. It is a strongly pejorative term, so pejorative that even the most ardently acquisitive person would dislike being called a materialist or materialistic. ("We are not the sum of our possessions," George Bush said in his inaugural address, but has anyone ever said that we were?) Students of philosophy know that materialism has another meaning altogether – that it refers to a philosophical outlook that assumes there is ultimately a material explanation for all phenomena, including supposedly spiritual phenomena. *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* defines materialism in the following way: "In philosophy, the position that nothing exists except matter – things that can be known or measured through the senses."

Philosophical materialism has a long and respectable history – from Democritus and Lucretius to Hobbes and Locke. Moreover, the nature of philosophical materialism remains very much a living issue in philosophy. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), the American philosopher Richard Rorty devotes many pages to clarifying various types of "materialist" positions. If contemporary moralists usually decry vulgar or shallow materialism, contemporary philosophers usually speak of "eliminative" or "reductive" materialism. Used in its philosophical sense, materialism is a word that carries no moral or emotional weight. A philosophical materialist will be praised or criticized for the quality of his argument, not his morality or lack thereof. Moreover, philosophical materialism does not logically entail a particular political position. We tend to assume that philosophical materialists are antispiritual and therefore politically "progressive," but Hobbes was a defender of absolute monarchy, and George Santayana, a self-described materialist, was a political conservative with a strong sympathy for Roman Catholicism.

Yet to say that philosophical materialists never had a political agenda would be misleading. In the eighteenth century, philosophical materialists, especially in France, were on the side of the Enlightenment. Not only were they strongly anticlerical – so was the monarchist Hobbes – but many also were strongly in favor of political change. Some writers – both critics and defenders of the social and political status quo – found the French materialists disturbing because they thought that philosophical materialism inevitably undermined traditional morality, turning man into a mere plaything of impersonal forces. In his *Life of Johnson*, James Boswell speaks of "the groveling belief of materialism" and praises

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Johnson for his interest in such "spiritual" questions as second sight. Rousseau called materialism "a philosophy convenient for the happy and rich, who make their paradise in this world." In many instances the antimaterialism of such writers was less a coherent position than a strong distaste for something they regarded as vulgar and immoral.

Tocqueville was also a critic of philosophical materialism. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville says: "There are many things that offend me about the materialists. I think their doctrines pernicious, and their pride revolts me." For Tocqueville, like Rousseau, materialism is not simply a philosophical outlook. It is a way of looking at the world that inevitably leads to a way of acting in the world. Philosophical materialism, Tocqueville implies, provides a justification for ordinary materialism. He warns that "in all nations materialism is a dangerous malady of the human spirit," but it is especially dangerous in a democracy, for the citizens of democratic states tend "to favor the taste for physical pleasures."

Although Tocqueville strongly disliked philosophical materialism, his criticism of materialism in all its guises is much milder than Rousseau's – mainly because he doesn't think ordinary materialism is a strong force in the world. "The heart of man," he says, "embraces much more than we suppose; it can at the same time contain a taste for the good things of this world and love of heavenly things; at times it seems madly intent on one of the two, but it is never long before it thinks of the other." Very much a student of Pascal, Tocqueville thinks man is a contradictory creature who is often pulled in two different directions at once. Materialism, then, will eventually be undercut by spirituality. And vice versa.

Even though democracy makes man more disposed to seek "physical pleasures," Tocqueville was not worried that Americans would succumb to ordinary materialism. For Americans, he says, are a church-going people, despite their materialistic bent. In church, "the American . . . escapes from himself"; in church the American becomes "free from the petty passions that trouble his life and the passing interests that fill it, [so that] he suddenly breaks into an ideal world where all is great, pure, and eternal." Tocqueville implies that so long as Americans remain a church-going people, they will never completely succumb to ordinary materialism.

When Tocqueville speaks of "spiritual pleasures," he means something specific: conventional religious worship. In anchoring spirituality to church-going, Tocqueville was going against the grain of nineteenth-century thought. Even before Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America*,

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spirituality had begun to float free, as it were, becoming a mysterious romantic trait that meant one was "above" the stale and false world of conventional bourgeois life – a world that reeked of hypocrisy and vacuity. In this sense, Rousseau was the first "spiritual" man in Europe – the prototype for thousands of others, who looked down especially on the world of commerce.

Spirituality also came to be associated with the distinctive ethos of a people. Some "races" were more spiritual than others. Though conventional Christian thought still said that spirituality was something that everyone could aspire to insofar as God's grace is available to all, for some German Romantic writers spirituality was something you were more likely to have if you were German rather than, say, French. Moreover, as spirituality began to lose its connection with conventional religious worship, so materialism changed its meaning – or, rather, added vague new meanings. Materialism was still a philosophical notion and it still referred to a narrowly acquisitive outlook, but it also came to be seen as a destructive modern force, one that destroyed old values.

Such ideas can be found in the work of the English essayist and historian, Thomas Carlyle. Throughout his life Carlyle inveighed against materialism, which he called the "Pig Philosophy." Materialism, he argued, was a world-view that ignored the profound spiritual depths men are capable of. Carlyle also blamed materialism for the exploitation of the agricultural and industrial poor. In 1831, when Tocqueville was in the United States gathering material for *Democracy in America*, Carlyle published "Characteristics," in which he attacked the "frightful materialism" predominant in England and France and praised the spiritual values evident in "the higher literature of Germany," where he saw "the beginning of a new revelation of the Godlike." According to Carlyle, materialism in all its guises – as a philosophical outlook or as "fierce Mammon-worship" – is responsible for England's being a sick, cold, cruel society, where "the old ideal of Manhood has grown obsolete," and "Heroic Action is paralysed." If in "Characteristics," Carlyle offers some hope that materialism is waning – "there are streaks of a dayspring in the east," – in later essays he is more given to despair. In the first of his "Latter-Day Pamphlets," written in 1850, he sounds a desperate note: "These days of universal death must be days of universal new birth, if the ruin is not to be total and final!"

Carlyle's exhortations are immoderate and vague, yet in many ways he is less radical than he appears. His calls for spiritual renewal have their roots in his stern Calvinist upbringing. His spirituality strays from its Christian roots, but never completely leaves it. Despite the German connection, Carlyle seems part of the English dissenting Protestant tradition

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– close to other Victorian sages, especially his friend John Ruskin, who also lamented the loss of old values. He is also a precursor of the twentieth-century English socialist, R. H. Tawney, who spoke of "the greedy materialists who rule mankind at present. . . ."

But if Carlyle's fierce antimaterialism seems mostly bluster, there is a disturbing aspect to it: his antimaterialism goes hand in hand with anti-Semitism. According to Carlyle, the fact that England was home to many rich Jews was a sign that the nation had become mired in materialism. As Fred Kaplan, a recent biographer, points out: "In his most sarcastic, pessimistic moments, he [Carlyle] thought it appropriate that Disraeli should be prime minister of this new England . . . because he believed England itself was coming to resemble the standardized image of the materialistic . . . Jew."

Carlyle's association of Jews with materialism became a commonplace of late nineteenth-century thought, especially in France and Germany. In fact, the term anti-Semitism was coined in Germany in the 1870s, where Jews were increasingly regarded as a people who used their economic power, as one commentator says, "to corrupt, exploit, and destroy the German people and its traditions." In France, the Dreyfus case yoked the notion of materialism with treachery. Jewish materialism made Jews untrustworthy; they were all like Judas Iscariot. As *Civilita Cattolica*, the official organ of the Jesuit order in Rome, said in 1898: "The Jew was created by God to serve as a spy wherever treason is in preparation." Jews were sinister as well as treacherous. A character in Hermann Broch's *The Anarchist* (which is set in 1903), says: "They're everywhere these Jews; they have all the money and no woman is safe from them, they're just like bulls."

In 1895 Henry Adams, who was strongly influenced by conservative French thought, wrote to his friend John Hay that "after all, the Jew question is really the most serious of our problems. It is capitalist methods run to their logical result." Adams was a shrewd investor and lived very nicely off corporate capitalism, but antimaterialist capitalists were not uncommon in Europe and the United States. "I am myself more than ever at odds with my time," Henry Adams had confessed to his brother Brooks in 1894. "I detest it . . . with all its infernal Jewry." But he was very much one with his time, because it was fashionable to speak of the Jews as a people whose materialistic bent made them the enemy of old values.

It was one thing to dislike supposedly materialistic Jews and vaguely wish, as the Jesuit writer would have it, that they "be excluded from the

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nation." It was another to develop a political program that promised to do much more than exclude Jews or curtail their civil rights – a program that finally solved the so-called "Jewish question." Karl Marx had such a program. He thought the Jewish question would be solved by the working out of the historical process. Once the transition to a classless society took place, there would be no more Mammon-worshipping Jews, but there also would be no more Christians – and, of course, no more capitalism. Like Carlyle and Adams, Marx regarded Jews as the incarnation of the materialistic spirit. Was Marx anti-Semitic? Perhaps, but the term does little to clarify the exact nature of Marx's animus against Jews. Marx had harsh things to say about Jews, but he was not so much against Jews or Judaism as against capitalists and capitalism.

Marx's attitude toward materialism is complicated. He attacked ordinary materialism, but he himself was a materialist insofar as he saw the mode of production – the economic sphere – as the central factor governing all other aspects of life. As Marx says in the afterword to the Second German edition of *Das Kapital*, Volume One: "My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelians, but it is its direct opposite. . . . With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought." The exact nature of Marx's "historical materialism" – a term coined by Engels – has been the subject of endless controversy. Marx opposed the "mechanistic materialism" of Feuerbach – that is, the idea that consciousness is nothing but a reflection of material conditions – but the extent to which he disagreed with Feuerbach is not clear, since he never fully clarified his view of the relation of the material world to the "superstructure." What we can say is that Marx was a philosophical materialist who thought the "law" of historical materialism would lead to the creation in Europe of a classless society of new men who would not be tainted by ordinary materialism.

What in hindsight was most ominous about Marx's political program was not its anti-Semitism but its supposed grounding in scientific law. As the prestige of science increased and the authority of religion declined, many late nineteenth-century intellectuals invoked science to help clarify the contemporary political scene and point the way to the future. Few pored over the latest scientific literature so thoroughly as Henry Adams, yet Adams's anti-Semitism was only marginally grounded in scientific theory. Adams, like most "traditional" anti-Semites, attacked Jews on cultural – not racial – grounds. Like Adams, George Santayana often complained about materialistic Jews. In 1936 he wrote to a member of the British "Aryan Society," "I don't like the Jewish spirit, because it is worldly, seeing God in thrift and success." But in the same

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letter he made it clear that he had no use for an Aryan Society: "Races, like nations, seem an unfortunate class of units to identify with moral ideas."

Hitler, as we know, thought otherwise. Like Marx, Hitler invoked science to support a political program that would end the supposed reign of materialistic Jews. But if Marx's program was based on revolution, Hitler's program came to be based on extermination. Hitler had much more in common with Lenin, whom he admired, than Marx. Like Lenin, Hitler stressed the importance of leadership. Both thought that a ruthlessly disinterested leader with an iron will was necessary to create a new political order.

Is Hitler the satanic conclusion to almost two hundred years of antimaterialist anti-Semitism? Yes and no. True, he courted Germany's traditional conservative anti-Semites by speaking of Jews as alien materialists who did not belong to the German community. But in many ways Hitler's anti-Semitism is very different from traditional antimaterialist anti-Semitism. In Hitler's scheme of things Jews were much worse than un-German; they were subhuman. As such, it was not enough to exclude them from the German community; they had to be eliminated altogether. Thus the Nazis were obsessed – to the detriment of their war effort – with killing millions of Jews who had nothing to do with things German and very little to do with modern values. These Jews were materialist only insofar as they had "Jewish blood."

Racial anti-Semitism probably ended with the collapse of Hitler's regime, but traditional anti-Semitism – equating Jews with materialism – certainly did not disappear, and in fact may be experiencing a resurgence in Western Europe and the Soviet Union. In Western Europe there has been some increase in the kind of literature that was popular at the turn of the century – Jews being described as materialist outsiders bent on world domination – but it is in the Soviet Union where the most virulent form of cultural anti-Semitism has reared its head. The Russian ultranationalists who belong to an organization called Pamyat have taken to quoting from "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a turn-of-the-century forgery that speaks of an international Judeo-Masonic conspiracy to rule the world – in order to support their contention that Jews are responsible for all that is wrong with Russia in particular and the Soviet Union in general. How many Russians endorse this extreme version of Russian nationalism, however, is a matter of conjecture.

In the postwar era antimaterialism has been associated less with anti-Semitism than with anti-Americanism. Many writers in Western Europe

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and the United States have denounced what Alfred Kazin has called "the commercial rapacity that invades every side of American life." Moreover, many of them have been quick to embrace the supposedly ascetic leaders of Marxist-Leninist regimes in the third world because the leaders of these regimes do not have "materialist values."

The latter tendency can be seen in the political travelogues Susan Sontag and Mary McCarthy wrote after they visited North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. For McCarthy the North Vietnamese had a "moral, ascetic government, concerned above all with the quality of Vietnamese life," whereas the American government championed consumerism and condoned "capitalist laws of marketing." The authors of many left-wing political travelogues – North Vietnam was a popular subject in the early 1970s, Nicaragua in the 1980s – tend to be less interested in learning about daily life under the new regime than in coming up with evidence to support their strongly held belief that the United States has always supported corrupt and materialist right-wing regimes.

If a preoccupation with American materialism has led many writers to make dubious pronouncements about American foreign policy, it has also lowered the level of debate about domestic political issues. During the Reagan era, many critics of that administration's policies preferred to attack motives rather than policies, and they tended, moreover, to attack the rich rather than articulate policies that might benefit the poor. Aside from lowering the level of debate, this moralistic approach to economic questions – with its incessant talk about greed – probably weakened the political power of the liberal left, since most Americans, at least in a time of relative prosperity, have not been persuaded by populist-sounding attacks against the supposedly materialistic rich.

Even before the Reagan era, there were many sermons decrying American materialism. In *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1977), the late Henry Fairlie, a British writer resident in the United States, claimed, "We feverishly pursue wealth today, destroying our lives, and those of others in the process. . . ." Never at a loss for hyperbole, Fairlie contended that this pursuit of wealth and possessions is "conducted with such single-mindedness" that it "constantly detracts us from spiritual things and not least from the spiritual side of our nature."

Who are these feverish people? Fairlie roundly condemns materialists, but he offers no evidence to support his argument. How, in any case, does one judge whether someone is a materialist? Recently, a market research survey concluded that "the hard fact is that materialism will continue to be one of the driving forces in American society over the next decade. . . ." Yet should we call Americans materialistic because they like to buy things? As one observer, commenting on the survey's conclusions,

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said: "It's hard to judge cultural values on the basis of surveys that ask people what they want. If someone asked me, I might say that I wanted a high-definition TV in my home, but that doesn't mean I'm materialistic." It's likely that many antimaterialist diatribes are animated more by snobbery than by moral concern – a fastidious dislike for those who work hard to better their condition (to use Adam Smith's famous phrase about the natural inclination of most people).

Despite their passion to improve their standard of living, Americans are not necessarily materialistic. As Santayana shrewdly put it: "The most striking expression of this [American] materialism is usually supposed to be his love of the almighty dollar; but that is a foreign and unintelligent view. The American talks about money, because that is the symbol and measure he has at hand for success, intelligence, and power; but as to money itself he makes, loses, spends, and gives it away with a very light heart."

If most critics of American materialism have been on the left, some have been on the right – seeing the average American's preoccupation with getting and spending as a sign of decadence. In a speech made to the British Parliament in 1976, Alexander Solzhenitsyn attacked all forms of materialism. "We have become hopelessly enmeshed in our slavish worship of all that is pleasant, all that is comfortable, all that is material," he said. Solzhenitsyn argued that materialism has made us soft, unable to withstand the Soviet threat. "Europe today," he said in the same speech, "is nothing more than a collection of cardboard stage sets, all bargaining with each other to see how little can be spent on defense in order to leave more for the comforts of life."

Solzhenitsyn – like Carlyle – regards both philosophical and ordinary materialism as the source of many aspects of Western culture that he deplores. Like Carlyle, he thinks the key to strengthening the West is spiritual renewal. But the connection between spiritual renewal and a strong defense of freedom is far from clear. Solzhenitsyn does not seem to realize that many clerics in the West who have ardently attacked the evils of Western materialism have also been ardent supporters of communist regimes in the Third World. Solzhenitsyn's article constitutes an immoderate attack on materialism, one that makes the notion of materialism do too much diagnostic work.

To chronicle the often dark history of antimaterialism, however, is not to apologize for the excesses of ordinary materialism. No one would wish to defend the vile materialistic excesses of the Marcos family in the Philippines. It goes without saying that the gross materialism of those in power has often gone in hand with a lack of concern for the poor – or even led to policies that bred misery. But we should also keep in mind

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that some of the world's worst despots – Robespierre and Lenin come to mind – were notably unmaterialistic. However much we deplore materialism, in politics the rhetoric of antimaterialism is usually vacuous or sinister. At the very least antimaterialism makes civilized debate difficult. At the worst, antimaterialism has been invoked to launch political programs that have been downright evil.

Coming In

Partisan Review

- Leszek Kolakowski: *The Decline of Historicism*
- Philippe Raynaud: *Feminism and the Ancien Régime*
- Robert Alter on Vladimir Nabokov
- Shlomo Avineri: *Reflections on Eastern Europe*
- Susan Dunn: *Revolutionary Myths in France and America*
- Donald Davie: *Three Pastors in Berlin*
- Walter Laquer: *The Intellectual Impact of Communism's Collapse*
- Morris Dickstein on Recent American Fiction
- Herbert Gold: *A Blazing Incident*
- Peter Loewenberg: *The Uses of Anxiety*

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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

It has become increasingly common for commercial galleries to mount exhibitions we would normally expect to see in museums: careful examinations of aspects of a career or a movement; retrospectives of serious artists fallen from – or never in – fashion; historical surveys; all accompanied by substantial catalogues. (Just why the museums aren't doing these shows is another issue.) Admittedly, the phenomenon can pose problems, since at best, commercial galleries aren't always able to pry loose key loans the way museums can and, at worst, harsh economic reality can overwhelm even the most high-minded intentions, but more often than not these exhibitions are thoughtful, intelligent, and answer real needs.

Last season's surveys of Marsden Hartley's late figure paintings and Stuart Davis's early works, at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, were exemplary, and last fall they continued in the same vein with an economical retrospective of the work of Jules Olitski. The show offered a chance to review the achievement of a painter last seen in depth at the Whitney Museum in 1973, in a retrospective exhibit organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Last fall's show concentrated on works from the 1960s and the 1980s, with only a few – albeit very choice – paintings from the 1970s, presumably because the over-all expanses of luminous color or crusty monochrome of those years are what Olitski is best known for. Only one complaint: I missed the early "modeled" pictures that Olitski executed in Paris in the 1950s. These sturdy, iconic paintings anticipate the density and solemnity of his most recent works and would have given them a new context.

Still, it was a pleasure to see the early stain paintings again, with their overscaled swoops and pools of intense color; they looked startlingly fresh, uncalculated and contemporary. Seeing them together with Olitski's recent pictures, with their aggressively ploughed surfaces, like the sweeps of giant paws, made the constants in his work evident, despite the shifts in palette and paint application over the years. The energy and generosity of Olitski's drawing remains unchanged, whether it spreads across the canvas as a broad stain, as it does in the 1960s, or asserts

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the edge of a stretch of color, the boundary between painting and not-painting, as it does in the 1970s; in his recent works, it becomes a pervasive rhythm that seems to generate the entire picture.

Generosity – maybe even "grandeur" – is a key word in speaking of Olitski's paintings. In his best work, there's always a sense that the pictures can barely contain themselves, as though we were offered a vision of a vast, universal force far greater than the dimensions of any single canvas. This has nothing to do with the size of the painting. It may have something to do with the deceptive simplicity, the apparent artlessness of Olitski's compositions, the sense that everything has fallen into place without calculation or effort, dictated by the necessity of covering a surface with color, but somehow transcending mere necessity.

It certainly has something to do with the elusiveness of Olitski's color, especially after he began applying pigment as a thinned-down spray. Even the most ceramic-like and opaque pictures of the 1970s, the ones with the least evidence of spectrum color, share this instability of hue. It takes time for the eye to perceive the subtle chromatic shifts that bring an Olitski canvas to life, create its evocative mood. After a few moments, monochrome expanses turn into pulsing, ephemeral seas of color, as though perception itself had become the subject of the picture or, at least, were being put to the test. In his most recent works, Olitski deliberately pits the most evanescent hues against the most robust dollops of paint, so that the pictures all but dissolve under the pressure of sight. What should be substantial and unequivocally physical becomes intangible, barely accessible through vision, like colored afterimages that fade and disappear as we try to focus on them.

It has been fashionable, in the past few years, to dismiss Olitski, even, in some circles, to hold him as an emblem of the failure of abstract painting. Lately, there's been a resurgence of interest, although he remains a difficult painter to "get," perhaps because his pictures appeal so deeply and directly to the senses, bypassing explication, political exegesis, deconstruction, and the like. But the reviews of a recent Olitski show in London suggest that perceptive eyes are once again able to see how powerful, how moving, how resonant his paintings can be. Last fall's miniretrospective should have convinced anyone who looked attentively.

The exhibition of Philip Guston's paintings that inaugurated David McKee's elegant new space last fall was similarly unlike the usual commercial gallery offerings. Here were neither the late gloomy cartoons that made Guston the universal art student's hero of the 1980s, nor the lyrical abstractions that established his reputation in the 1950s, nor even what may be his best pictures, the edgy abstractions of the late fifties, with their blocks of muddied primary colors struggling to escape from

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thick gray paint. Rather, we were confronted by a group of Guston's troubled and troubling "dark pictures," painted between 1961 and 1965, when the artist was wrestling with apparently unreconcilable notions of abstraction and figuration.

The show consisted of brooding "still lifes" and "portraits" – tangles of black-gray strokes floating like disembodied spirits in turbid fields, with the surrounding fabric of strokes in turn hovering uneasily against the canvas. (The relation of these floating fields to the edges of the canvas is not always entirely convincing.) Some of these difficult paintings refuse to become pictures; they remain diagrams of unease, evidence of both faltering confidence and stubborn will. The best of them are pain made manifest, existential paradigms that, more than any of the scuzzy eighties art that claims Guston as an ancestor, embody the bleakness of modern urban life. These paintings were greeted with hostility and suspicion when Guston first showed them twenty-five years ago. "They ruined his career," David McKee says. It's good McKee has the courage to show them now; they clarify our view of a painter too often judged by only a small portion of his work.

The slightly skewed overview of twentieth-century British art at Hirschl and Adler, this past November and December, was in some ways more uneven than the shows at Salander-O'Reilly and McKee, but it was no less ambitious and, whatever one's opinion of what it comprised, it was informative and useful. "The British Imagination" included a decidedly individual selection of paintings and drawings and a curious selection of sculptures. It was not quite the comprehensive vision of the subject that it promised to be, but it provided a much-needed background for the handful of British painters, notably Howard Hodgkin, Francis Bacon, and David Hockney, with whom the New York public has chosen to be enraptured. While it was easy to quibble with specific inclusions and omissions (as it always is in group shows), "The British Imagination" was a fine antidote to the masses of unsupported rhetoric that British art seems to generate in the American press.

It was instructive to see subtle post-Impressionist works by Gwen John and Walter Sickert presented as precursors of the obsessive realism of Stanley Spencer and Lucian Freud, to see the loaded canvases of David Bomberg hung not far from the even more loaded, downright overburdened canvases of his "heirs," Leon Kossoff and Frank Auerbach. The Hodgkins at Hirschl and Adler were better than any in the solo Hodgkin show next door at M. Knoedler and Company, and seeing them beside one of Ivon Hitchens's dreamy near-landscapes made a great deal of sense, although it would have been nice to have seen more than one Hitchens. William Scott and Ben Nicholson represented yet another sensibility, a

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rather wispy and fragile one that made you think again about the early Hockney hung over the stairs. And so on.

The works ranged from first-rate to expedient. Some artists seemed to receive more than their due, while others were summarily represented or even noticeably absent, but on the whole, the show offered us a chance to see for ourselves what has been happening and make up our own minds about it. That's something to be grateful for.

It's not surprising that New York audiences have had little opportunity to follow the evolution of recent British painting. We're just as ignorant of what happened in Italy and Germany, between their early modernist movements and the contemporary work that has been greeted with so much enthusiasm. What is more remarkable is finding comparable neglect of an American born and bred artist, and an extraordinarily important and influential one at that: the sculptor David Smith. Yes, I know the Whitney and the Museum of Modern Art have some fine Smiths, but that's not the same as organizing an illuminating show. The way one of Smith's best mature sculptures, the perplexing and threatening *Zig IV* (1961), has been treated by its owner, Lincoln Center, seems typical. It has been placed with truly breathtaking indifference in the lobby of the Vivian Beaumont Theater, in what has recently been designated the smoking area. A more hideous carpet, a more unsympathetic setting, a more distracting background cannot be imagined.

The last New York exhibition that examined Smith's sculpture in any depth was a traveling museum show focusing on his sculpture and related drawings of the 1930s and 1940s, which ended its tour at Knoedler Gallery in 1982. (I'm sure of the date because I was the curator.) Later that year, two large Smith exhibitions were held concurrently at the Hirshorn and the National Gallery in Washington, but neither came to New York. Because of this history, the small, concentrated exhibit of Smith's early sculptures and paintings at Washburn Gallery in November was doubly welcome, for its own merits and because it helped to enlarge our knowledge of an artist who is arguably our greatest sculptor.

Smith's paintings add to our understanding of how he worked, even of how he thought, but by and large, they are more absorbing in relation to his sculptures than in themselves. They are usually engaging period pieces, evidence that Smith, like so many of his colleagues—Arshile Gorky, for example—passionately admired Picasso and was fascinated by the Surrealist-inspired biomorphism of the 1930s. In Smith's rather heavy hands, however, the toothy wraiths that haunt his contemporaries' pictures become solid and, well, *buildable*. Most of the paintings, in fact, look like preparations for sculptures, like renderings of

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things that could be constructed in three dimensions, in the same way as Picasso's series of skeletal bathers, those paintings of elongated, bony "cages" set against sea and sand, were intended, it seems, as images of ideal, unbuilt monuments.

Smith, however, appears to have treated his paintings not so much as surrogates for sculpture (although some may be just that) but as preliminary versions. He often constructed images first stated on canvas in metal, a few years later. (Of course, this is also an indication of his life-long habit of repeating particular images, abandoning them, and then returning to reinvent them, at irregular intervals.) Despite his acclaim as a sculptor, Smith always insisted that he "belonged with painters" and explained that he had begun to make sculpture, in the first place, via the flat canvas. Construction in three dimensions, he said, was a logical extension of the way he used aggressively varied textures to separate planes in his two-dimensional paintings.

Yet it was clear from even the small selection of works at Washburn that Smith thought as a sculptor from the beginning. Not only do his painted images look as though they could be built, but they already point to the nuances of space, the subtleties of how things touch and project, the way things nudge each other out of true that are so crucial to Smith's three-dimensional work. The play of color on a flat surface, the notion of a painting as a continuous expanse of strokes seem to have been less interesting to him than the depiction of the potentially solid.

The sculptures in the show from the thirties and early forties were small and fierce, teetering between representation and allusive abstraction. Smith was in his late twenties and early thirties when he made them, inventing a method of metal working as he went along, improvising a new expressive formal language based loosely on radical European works he knew only from descriptions and black-and-white photos. There are echoes of Picasso and González in these pieces, even of early Surrealist Giacometti, in a slung, reclining carapace-like figure, but they are already very much *Smith*. (It helps to remember that when Smith made his first constructions in metal – the first created in the United States – in 1933, Picasso and González had been making constructed metal sculpture for less than five years.) Smith's profound individuality is already evident in the sculptures' elusive, open forms, their confrontational stances, and their delicate, complex spatial play. Among other things, the exhibition helped to remind us of just how articulate and physical Smith's sculptures always are. They photograph as unnaturally flat, but in the flesh, even these modestly-sized, charged figures and heads, bathers and billiard players displace space as much as they allow themselves to be penetrated.

Smith's sculptures help us to read his paintings, just as his early

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sculptures help us to read his later ones, but further enlightenment came when at just about the same time Babcock Gallery mounted a small, painstakingly researched show of work by Edgar Levy, one of Smith's closest friends, a neighbor, and an early mentor, in the late 1920s and 1930s. It was obvious how much Levy – whom Smith's first wife, the sculptor Dorothy Dehner, described as "a real intellectual" – and Smith had to say to each other. Levy was reluctant to show his work even in the thirties, but it was plain that he thoroughly understood what Picasso's Synthetic Cubist paintings had to offer, perhaps even before Smith did. While Levy's figures and heads sometimes seem mere imitations of Picassoid mannerisms, his still lifes, particularly a large canvas on an axis as you entered the gallery, were demonstrations of his ability to invent within a Cubist idiom.

It would have been interesting to have seen Smith's paintings and Levy's side by side, to verify just how much more painterly, or rather, how much more conceived as paint on a surface the Levys were. It was good to see these paintings, with their strong, handsome color harmonies, their ample, assertive drawing, but I kept wishing, too, that I could have seen them next to Gorkys of the period, or Stuart Davises. There's an exhibition of American Cubism that badly needs doing.

If the origins of the audacious, hieratic steel constructions of Smith's mature years were hinted at by the show at Washburn, the persistence of his influence, twenty-five years after his death, could be seen in the first New York showing of sculptures by the British-born Peter Hide, at André Emmerich Gallery in November. Hide, who has been teaching in Western Canada for the last dozen years or so, was, like many of the best of the younger British sculptors, a product of London's prestigious St. Martin's School of Art, where Anthony Caro taught for many years, at the time when he was reinventing the language of construction in steel that he had inherited from Smith. Caro put this language into the service of a new kind of constructed sculpture that, unlike Smith's, was primarily about the eloquence of placement and interval and, for a long time, also about extension and openness. Hide, in turn, had to transform what he learned from Caro.

He has succeeded. Hide's work is distinguished by its mass and solidity. He piles up chunks of steel and then slices into them, almost as though he were carving in stone. He does, in fact, often achieve the unity and bulk of traditional carved or modeled sculpture, improbably wedding them to the strong profiles and angular clarity of construction. Many of Hide's best works feel architectural, with a chunky singularity that is very much his own. I've seen compelling pieces that, while completely self-sufficient, seemed, at the same time, like fragments of cathe-

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drals – buttresses or door jambs – that had somehow come adrift.

Hide showed only two works at Emmerich, one a rather restrained (for him) "classical" assembly with an open frame held aloft, like an echo of a Cubist *gueridon*. It reminded me, at several removes, of Smith's tabletop still life sculptures of the early 1960s, but I preferred the second, larger piece, a tough, unpredictable variation of the *gueridon* theme, rather like an oversized, demented fire hydrant. Paradoxically both solid and springy below, with massive, crumpled sheets "waving" above, it was baroque without being florid, grand without being pompous. From some views, the soft convexities of the "front" were surprisingly angular and skeletal. Both sculptures were vigorous and arresting, but it would be nice to see more Hides. I've been following his work for about fifteen years and am convinced that as good as the pieces he showed at Emmerich were, he's even more original than they suggest. Hide is a welcome addition to the scene, and we can only hope to see more work in the future.

Edmonton, Alberta, where Hide teaches, is an anomaly – a small, remote but sophisticated city with more than its share of good, serious abstract artists, among them an even more disproportionate number of good, serious abstract sculptors. No, it's not all Hide's doing, although he certainly has been an important influence on some of the younger generation, many of them his former students. But Hide came to a city (and a region) with a long history of direct connections with advanced abstraction. This isn't the place for a history of Western Canadian modernism, but briefly, he joined a community in Alberta and neighboring Saskatchewan of ambitious veterans of workshops led by luminaries ranging from Barnett Newman to Frank Stella, as well as Kenneth Noland, Michael Steiner, Olitski, and Caro, among others. Several gifted young sculptors about Hide's age, notably Douglas Bentham in Saskatchewan and Alan Reynolds in Edmonton itself, were already beginning to declare their presence through their muscular, original works when Hide arrived.

Reynolds's evolution was explored in a fifteen-year retrospective organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery in September and October. (A slightly reduced version of the show will tour Canadian museums.) He's an impressive artist, perhaps the closest to Smith in spirit of any of his generation. Like Smith's, Reynolds's work depends a great deal on touch. The early works in wood that established his reputation (and made him one of the first young Canadians to be shown at Toronto's famed David Mirvish Gallery) combined straightforward joinery with peculiar drawing in the form of eccentrically-cut edges and slashes. He has been able to incorporate this evidence of the hand into his recent

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sculpture without its appearing forced; it simply makes the works more personable and lively. Like Smith, too, Reynolds seems to improvise his work from vernacular, eccentric forms, and again the result – as in the work of his distinguished predecessor – is sculpture that, no matter how abstract, has enormous presence, like loose jointed figures that confront us and demand attention. They also turn inward, eluding immediate discovery. This sense of the hidden, the unknowable, has been characteristic of Reynolds's work from the first, from his early "walls" of thick timbers – inspired, he says, by Morris Louis's diaphanous *Veils* – that literally block our view, to the complex, withdrawn, steel "throne-figures" of the past few years. Reynolds is forty-three – young for an abstract artist. It will be rewarding to see what he does in the next fifteen years.

An equally impressive but smaller group of works, a series of "table-landscapes" by Catherine Burgess, one of Reynolds's younger colleagues, followed his exhibit at the Edmonton Art Gallery. I didn't see the show, but I did see the pieces and found them intensely personal, poetic, and fascinating in their exploration of shifts in scale. Burgess, who was Reynolds's studio assistant in the seventies, has emerged as an original and tough-minded presence in a branch of sculpture dominated by chest-beating males. Her earlier works were often more "orthodox" demonstrations of the possibilities of construction in metal, but for the past few years, she has been allowing her sculpture to be more referential, making more explicit things implicit in earlier pieces. Yet whatever specific meanings Burgess herself attaches to the geometric "characters" – discs, rings, cubes, bars, and the like – with which she populates her poignantly empty tabletops, there is nothing literal about them. They are rich with implications and ambiguities. The distance between elements, the angles at which they sit, small changes in level, and the wrenchings out of true become eloquent, while the sense of alluding to landscape or architectural space, without the sculpture's appearing scaled-down or miniaturized, is arresting. I liked the low, long tables better than the taller, more familiar ones, simply because they were more about expanse and less about object, but I was convinced by all of them. I just wish I'd been able to see them installed.

Although Western Canadian sculptors would argue this, they have no monopoly on provocative work, even provocative work in steel, as the October exhibition by a new Toronto sculptor, Evan Levy, made clear. Levy's show at Lake Galleries was testimony to his having come a long way in a short time. His most recent works, spiny gatherings of steel rods, are like insistent, ferocious line drawings of irrational structures. The best are the most improbable: a "fishtrap" and giant "breadbasket" combination, or a fusion of a schematic "hut" and an oversized

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"wheatsheaf." An atypically solid piece, a slatted shell rearing itself up on end, may point to a new direction. Levy is assured, daring, and often very good. He gets into trouble when his work looks too preconceived, or when he seems to have simply accepted the givens of a particular material, but he's willing to take risks and test the limits of his ideas. He's someone to watch.

A final note. The much-vaunted, much-discussed "High-Low" show at the Museum of Modern Art, "Modern Art and Popular Culture," the debut of MOMA's new Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kirk Varnedoe, has managed to enrage just about everyone, cutting across ideological, aesthetic, and political differences. I suppose this is an accomplishment. Since Varnedoe-bashing has become a local sport, I will say only that it's a show that misses its own point; the way modernism embraced all kinds of things, popular culture included, that high art traditionally refused to acknowledge is a provocative theme and a much larger and more interesting one than the narrow, over-literal view afforded us by "High-Low."

On the other hand, the Brooklyn Museum's October through December exhibition of Milton Avery's drawings, organized by Linda Kohnheim Kramer, was a model of what museum shows should be. The sensitively chosen works, spanning virtually all of Avery's mature career, made his extraordinary range and inventiveness as a draughtsman obvious. It was all the more enlightening because we tend to think of Avery primarily as a colorist. It was clear from this show, however, that like his mentor Matisse (with whom he hated to be compared), Avery was a master of line, of tone, of black and white oppositions. There was a handsome catalogue, too, with good illustrations and an intelligent essay. All in all, a delight.

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BOOKS

DISSIDENTS ABROAD

SAY CHEESE. By Vassily Aksyonov. Random House. $19.95.
GOODNIGHT. By Abram Tertz. Viking Penguin. $22.95.

Conformists are all alike; dissidents are all different – and more original. Andrei Sinyavsky's and Vassily Aksyonov's new novels are striking examples of this literary rule. *Say Cheese* by Aksyonov is a very amusing and skillfull work, as it charts the waters of the dissident imagination. *Goodnight* by Sinyavsky (writing as Abram Tertz) is a strange, haunting mixture of narrative, commentary, and rumination. Both writers live in exile, Sinyavsky in Paris, Aksyonov in Washington, D.C. Sinyavsky spent seven years in a labor camp for having a premature criticism of socialist realism smuggled to the West, using the pseudonym of Abram Tertz. Aksyonov was forced to leave the Soviet Union for "treasonable" writings. Sinyavsky strikes one as the most profound and resourceful Russian writer today; Aksyonov as one of the most intelligent.

Say Cheese tells the rambling story of Russian people caught in the Kafkaesque web of Soviet bureaucratic constrictions, evading the fatalities of the life dictated from above through irony, doubletalk, and cunning. (One is reminded of Joyce's "silence, exile, and cunning.") In a sense there is no story, only a series of comic incidents as everyone tries to escape from his or her prescribed existence. It is a well-made novel, surprisingly fluid in the agile twists and turns of the narrative and its utter disregard of earlier Soviet literary conventions. It has the free flow of an American-style novel, but it is not a blockbuster. It is a contemporary, not a modern, novel.

The prevailing spirit of *Say Cheese* is irreverence, which I suppose is the basic substance of dissidence. In this respect, *Say Cheese* reminds one of the eighteenth-century British picaresque novel, set, however, in Stalinized Russia. It turns around the escapades of a group of underground photographers, called Cheesers, who defy the government with unsocialist photography. The main character, an antihero, Max "Ogo" Ogorodnikov, is a sexual and political adventurer who moves from woman to woman, place to place, caper to caper, thumbing his nose at authority, and ending up at a swish party in New York. It is most entertaining, but it raises the question of topically dissident writing. For Gorbachev, in taking Russia at least partly out of its past, has lifted it to a new level of problematic freedoms that tends to make earlier pictures of Russia seem somewhat out of date.

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However, the novel does recreate a sense of what appears to be the life of the country, even now in the Gorbachev era. One gets the impression of an interweaving of identities, a whirlpool of spying, infiltrating, snitching, defying the regime, whoring, drinking, evading the secret police. The KGB penetrates every bit of life, sometimes comically, sometimes brutally. The whole is Russia. Everyone is playing cat-and-mouse with everyone else. And it is all drenched in suffering, opportunism, soul-seeking. Looking for sexual recognition, Max has had seven wives and countless women. There are fifty characters moving in and out of the pages of the novel, all making their way through the ambiguities of Soviet existence, puffing themselves up, mocking themselves and each other. And everyone plays his role, somewhere between belonging to and subverting the regime. Aksyonov tells it all with a sharp sardonic eye and ear, as he satirically catches the pieties of the official language. In fact, the novel is a verbal *tour de force*, chatty, and sprawling verbally over a landscape that seems so unreal to us, and is made both more and less real by Aksyonov's merging of reality with farce.

Goodnight is in the tradition of modernism, of the kind that Joseph Brodsky distinguished from the ordinary fiction of dissidents. Perhaps its most striking and dominant note is its transposition of Sinyavsky's not too untypical Soviet experience into a fugue of memories, speculations, and narratives that has a cool air of detachment from the original experience. Hence the novel – if it is indeed a novel – is difficult to summarize. It is divided into five chapters. The first flashes back to his arrest, and to the endless cunning interrogations that mix sympathy with threats. Chapter Two is set in the prison camp – though not seen from a distance – and interweaves scenes from his trial. Chapter Three recollects the sad fate of his father, an old social revolutionary, who is a passive victim of the ever-present repressive machine, as he falls within the cracks of Soviet society. The fourth chapter is a remarkable representation of Stalin without ever describing him or relating his life. It is told by means of literary mirrors. The last chapter tells the story, without really telling it, of Sinyavsky's entranced and guilty association with the innocent daughter of a foreign diplomat, whom Sinyavsky is ordered to entrap. He both involves her and by a prearranged ruse warns her of the plot. Sinyavsky maintains an atmosphere of sardonic mystery by breaking the chronology of the narrative and relating it as though it had happened at some distant time in a distant place. Even his guilt is kept problematic by interspersing his involvement with his efforts to keep the girl uninvolved, though it hovers over the story.

What is most surprising and impressive about *Goodnight* is the utter lack of anger and bitterness. In this respect, the book reminds me of

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Kafka's fiction where all the neurotic terrors of Kafka's life are transposed into an ironic web of circumstances, and tragedy is transformed into a tragi-comedy. For example, the section on the boyhood friend of Sinyavsky, who apparently betrayed him by turning informer, is masterful. It tells the story without anger, without recrimination. The portrait of the Judas-friend is that of a maverick, a charmer: Sinyavsky calls him a genius. He has some qualities of a Dostoyevskian character—whose genius lies in his personality and who is successful only in his treachery.

Perhaps the highlight of the book is the chapter on Stalin. His brutality and domination of the entire country are conveyed indirectly, by suggestive strokes that indicate the Stalinization of every facet of life in the Soviet Union. And possibly this is the key to the lack of hatred in the novel: Sinyavsky assumes that the evils of the regime became the norms of behavior. Another wonderful part is the account of his night with his wife, the one night permitted by the prison camp, in a house provided for that purpose. The excitement, the terror, the surreal comedy of the situation are given a dramatic focus by the intervention of a guard peeping through a keyhole. Sinyavsky discovers the guard squatting before an adjacent keyhole when his wife asks him to open the door to freshen the smoke-filled room. The keyhole of the Sinyavskys' door, fortunately, is stuffed, probably done by earlier occupants frustrating a guard turned voyeur.

Other superb touches are Sinyavsky's silhouettes of people, such as that of his wife, Mariva, and his interrogator Postnikov. In each case, the brush strokes are never directed at the center; they come from all sides – illustrating Sinyavsky's belief that reality lies beyond straightforward realism. His wife emerges as a shadowy but strong-willed fatalist. Postnikov, the interrogator, comes through as a pompous, insecure but self-satisfied *apparatchik* who, because his job is to understand the person he is examining, actually develops a feeling for his Russian soul. Sinyavsky is able to achieve this kind of writing by indirection, by his command of an intellectually racy and fragmented prose that seems to be moving in all directions at once – much like the prose of Saul Bellow. There is one strange and disturbing note. Sinyavsky says at one point – and I assume it is not a literary invention – that he had heard that the KGB arrested him on a tip from the C.I.A. The story came from a "well-informed individual [in Paris, who] swore up and down that when he was in the U.S.A. he had heard . . . a senator say the KGB had been informed of Tertz's real character by American intelligence in exchange for data on a new Soviet submarine."

But the *deus ex machina* is literature. To an American sensibility, Sinyavsky somtimes seems to iconize literature. He constantly invokes its

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essence, its linguistic force, its powers of sustenance. However, this invocation of literature is very Russian, and one is reminded how important literature was as a form of dissidence even under the Czar, and under Stalin it appears to have been one of the means of survival – at least for the intelligentsia. Hence the entire novel has the somnolent literary effect of having its horrors recollected in tranquility. It is the medium by which Sinyavsky has been able to say "Goodnight" to the stifling Russian regime and "Good morning" to his now free but alien life in Paris.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

GREY MATTER

GREY IS THE COLOR OF HOPE. By Irina Ratushinskaya. Translated by Alyona Kojevnikov. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.

As I write on this 27th of September 1989, the precipitant crumbling of the Soviet empire seems to have become an unstoppable process. Nations rise one after another to divulge that the spirit of internationalism meant as living under the skirts of Mother Russia somehow does not make them perfectly happy. The centrally-planned economy, which has never worked in any event, gives a whole new meaning to the notion of nonworking with each passing day. Soviet industrial workers go on strikes; parliamentarians engage in live television debates; journals feature Alexander Solzhenitsyn's works; Vladimir Pozner reminds us daily in his cute American English that he personally has always been speaking the truth regardless of the consequences; and generals of the KGB, those renowned sticklers-for-the-law and humanitarians, publicly declare that no, they have never even violated anybody's rights by as much as bugging his phone. In these heady days of *perestroika* reaching the stage when the term should be translated as "collapse of the prison walls" rather than "reconstruction of the crystal palace of communism," it is hard to believe that only seven years ago today the Russian poet Irina Ratushinskaya was arrested and subsequently put in a hard labor camp for the heinous crime of "manufacture and dissemination" of her own poems. It is harder to believe that she was kept in that camp until October 1986, to be finally released just two days before the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Reykjavik. And it is even harder to believe that, *perestroika* or no *perestroika*, camps such as the one she describes still exist in today's Soviet Union.

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In *Grey Is the Color of Hope*, her camp memoir, Ratushinskaya confines herself with a deliberate strictness to the account of her experience of incarceration. The narration starts with the moment of the author's release (or, rather, her enigmatic ride under escort in a KGB car, which only after some tense moments turns out to be a ride to freedom). The rest is a 350-page-long flashback recounting, with an almost pain-inducing vividness, the details of her stay in the Small Zone, a special section for female political prisoners in a camp in Mordovia.

This exclusive focus on the camp theme may leave the unprepared reader in a fog. Ratushinskaya says next to nothing about her life up to the moment of her arrest, nor does she say much about what happened to her after her release. But then, it would be difficult to find a Western reader today who could claim total ignorance of this brave woman's life story. Her arrest in 1982 made Ratushinskaya a *cause célèbre* in the West, mostly thanks to the indefatigable efforts of her husband, the well-known human rights activist Igor Gerashchenko. After her release, and their subsequent emigration, first to England, then to this country, she has not disappeared from public view either. As a consequence, the undistracted attention Ratushinskaya devotes to her experience as a camp inmate proves to be just the right approach to the matter at hand. By adopting this approach, she shifts her memoir's center of gravity from the presentation of an individual life to the in-depth analysis of the system that tries to turn each and every individual life into its fodder and fertilizer. This book is not supposed to be a record of personal suffering, a settling of accounts with former persecutors, or a document of the author's own grace under pressure; or rather, it does perform all these functions on the side of the author's intent, while being primarily a study of what happens to our humanity under inhuman conditions.

If anyone in the West could still, after the earlier accounts of Soviet authors such as Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, Marchenko, or Bukovsky, harbor any doubts as to the fundamental inhumanity of the past and present *Gulag Archipelago*, he would be finally convinced by Ratushinskaya's description of her own and other women's lives in the camp. Imagine incarceration which consists not only in depriving you of your freedom of movement but also all other freedoms, including freedom of belief (even an offically-published postcard with a reproduction of a holy icon is confiscated as dangerous religion-spreading material) and freedom of expression (the camp barracks are bugged and your letters to your family are censored as a matter of course). And this is just the beginning. Your life is also stripped bare of all the basic amenities you consider indispensable for a civilized human being. The material conditions of the camp, both deliberately imposed and resulting from the persecutors' I-couldn't-

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care-less attitude to the prisoners' well-being, reduce you to living in filth, cold, and hunger; diseases are rampant, and health care is a travesty. If that were not enough to break your spirit, you are being deprived, at every step of the way, of the last vestiges of your human dignity as well. You are forced to wear an identity tag and prison garb; mercilessly exploited as part of the camp's workforce; beaten up, cursed, and lied to with impunity; blackmailed into informing on your best friends; punished for imaginary offenses. "Punished" is too mild a word: more often than not, you are in the hands of sadists authorized to do anything to break your moral backbone. They may take away your right to have a family member visit you once a year for as little as your refusal to wear an identity tag; they may throw you for two weeks into an unheated isolation cell in the midst of winter – with no underclothes, to make sure that you'll freeze to death – for not standing at attention when a supervisor enters the room.

What distinguishes the true hell is that it has no bottom; underneath what seems to be one, there is always another. The so-called *Shizo* (the Russian acronym for the punishment isolation cell) is just one of such carefully planned bottoms beneath the bottom. You think that your camp barrack, with its cold, filth, and stinking food, is hell itself: All right, let's put you in a *Shizo*, with no heating at all, even more undescribable food, and a couple of rats for good measure, and see how soon you'll begin to promise anything for letting you go back to your barrack, that paradise lost. You still refuse to bend? How about stripping you naked? Or putting a deranged inmate into your cell? Ratushinskaya, who went through innumerable *Shizos* herself, makes one point hit home with unerring clarity: the inner structure of the Soviet penitentiary system, in Andropov's and Chernenko's times, just as in Stalin's, has been founded upon the underlying principle of "re-educating" the prisoner. In translation from Soviet newspeak, this re-education means breaking the prisoner's spirit, crushing the resistant fibers of the human self into the pliable pulp of the instinct of self-preservation. The Nazi death camps had a simpler task: they were just supposed to turn human bodies into ashes. The Soviet labor camps are not above destroying the weaker human bodies either, but their chief aim is to destroy the human soul. Ultimately, it is not the Soviet writer, as Maxim Gorky would have had it, but the Soviet warden who appears the true "engineer of human souls."

This kind of engineering (if the business of destruction may be termed so) is certainly much more efficient than Soviet engineering in the areas of housing construction or nuclear energy but, fortunately, it is not completely fail-safe either. The Gulag had its own Chernobyls – isolated yet all the more consequential instances of the human soul's refusing to

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be harnessed and breaking free even as the starved, frozen, beaten-up, body-searched, diseased, and exhausted flesh remains locked up behind the barbed wire. At one point Ratushinskaya reflects on an official slogan hovering over the camp's gate: "BACK TO FREEDOM WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE." Ironically, to take this exhortation at its face value means to incur the most torrid wrath of the camp authorities. Anyone who wishes to save his clear conscience in the camp is automatically on a collision course with hundreds of regulations, the principal aim of which is precisely to turn his conscience into manure and, ultimately, to do away with the very notion of conscience.

Having slid down into such an animal state of mind in which no moral principles are valid anymore and only self-preservation counts is, under skillfully applied pressure, a relatively easy thing with which to end up. Ratushinskaya makes no attempt at romanticizing or mythologizing the camp reality; she never denies the fact that the overwhelming majority of the camp population – warders perhaps to an even greater extent than prisoners – does indeed represent such a sorry state of human degradation. And yet, it is exactly against this appalling background that the isolating instances of humanity shine all the more brightly. The Small Zone, in which Ratushinskaya spent the greater part of her four years of incarceration, actually a single wood hut housing just a few female political offenders and encircled by barbed wire, fences, and watchtowers, was such a rare oasis of moral health. The fortitude of the women, some of whom had had years of experience as political prisoners behind them, realized full well the paradox of the camp existence: even though it is your clear conscience that exposes you most to the anger of the authorities, having it is nonetheless your only chance of surviving the camp. Only a strict ethical code can give one the kind of inner strength without which a human being becomes, in these conditions, a formless heap of primitive instincts, an easy prey for intimidators and exploiters.

Crucial in gaining this strength is the realization that clear conscience can be only achieved through an individual act of choice. Perhaps the most admirable feature of the group described by Ratushinskaya (admittedly, an exceptional group of the most conscientious political prisoners) is that it never exerted any collective pressure on any of its members. The women helped each other and acted as one against their oppressors, but they never let their resistance be tainted by the poison of some reverse totalitarianism. The sensitive question of wearing identity tags, for instance, was left to the individual inmate's discretion; even though someone who decided to wear the tag hurt the group by breaking the common front, the danger of trampling the individual's rights by forced compliance was perceived as something much worse.

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But can a prisoner deprived of virtually everything put up any successful resistance at all? Ratushinskaya's book, in fact not so much a memoir as a shrewd treatise on human deprivation and resistance, offers as many as three variants of an affirmative answer. First, you may beat your persecutors with their own weapon: if they threaten you with deprivation, you may adopt self-deprivation as your defensive strategy. This is the case of the hunger strike, which, ironically, may well be the most effective method of presenting your demands or protests to the authorities who put you on a starvation diet anyway. Personally, they don't give a damn about you and your health, of course, but a prisoner's having starved himself to death would be a major blemish on their professional records, so they may sometimes go to great lengths to avoid that (that is, *unless they choose to resort to the brutal method of force-feeding*). Second, even under the strictest regime there must be some leaks in the prison wall: your contact with the outside world can never be completely cut off, and any echo that your resistance provokes helps your cause. Third, and most important, the utmost deprivation may always be countered by your act of creating something. It may be a miniature vegetable garden that you grow and tend secretly on a patch of ground in your camp zone. It may be a window whose broken pane you fix with a lump of chewed-up bread. It may be a poem you compose in your memory, read to the audience of your inmates, and then try to smuggle out of the camp, sometimes succeeding in reaching the world at large. All these things, insignificant as they may seem, give you exactly what the enforcers of the camp "re-education" program try most fiercely to take away from you: your human identity and sense of purpose, the meaning of your own individual existence.

Ratushinskaya was born in 1954, a year after Stalin's death. In spite of her youth, however, at the point of her release she was a seasoned practitioner of all the aforementioned crafts of resistance, from hunger striking to writing poetry. Her accumulated experience of spiritual survival under the harshest of circumstances makes her one of those rare contemporaries of ours who not only were once able to find hope for themselves in their brutal predicament but continue to kindle similar hopes in others. Read alongside the news of communism's retreat in Eastern Europe, her book sounds by no means obsolete. On the contrary, it reminds us that even after the communist system's total collapse, we will be left with the grey mass of the millions of products of "re-education," former inmates and former warders in that colossal labor camp that the Soviet Union was and still to a large extent is. At the same time, the book reminds us that this grey mass includes individuals such as Ratushinskaya herself – and it is to these courageous, honest,

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thinking people and acts of their early resistance, not the liberal Party bosses and acts of their belated repentance, that we owe the current demise of totalitarianism. The grey of their brain cells is the color of our hopes.

STANISLAW BARANCZAK

Do Myths History Make?

DID THE GREEKS BELIEVE IN THEIR MYTHS? AN ESSAY ON THE CONSTITUTIVE IMAGINATION. By Paul Veyne. Translated by Paula Wissing. University of Chicago Press. $25.00.

The question "Did the Greeks believe in their myths?", like the question, "Does your dog bite?", will inevitably elicit a qualified answer: "Our dog never bites, except when he does." Veyne shows that although many questions about myths were asked by Greeks and Romans throughout classical antiquity, no one apparently thought of suggesting that the myths did not represent historical fact, at least at some level, such as regarding names or places: "The Greeks never admitted that the myth-making process could lie to everyone about everything." Thus even if Homer made Odysseus sound too good or Achilles's wrath seems disproportionately important, the Greeks seemed never to have doubted that there had been a Trojan War.

The next question is, of course, why did the Greeks never think to ask why the mythmaking process couldn't lie to everyone about everything? Why did they assume that there was in every story at least some basis of truth? Veyne proposes that they were limited by what he calls *l'imagination constituante*, or framework of thought, that places all those living at a particular place and time into a cultural "fishbowl" only a few individuals of genius have power to break out of. The Greeks' cultural fishbowl kept them from asking if there had ever been a real Trojan War, just as our fishbowl restricts us, though evidently in other ways.

Veyne approaches these fascinating issues with considerable erudition and energy. But his treatment of the topic seems to me to be off-putting, annoyingly complicated, and pretentious. Too often he plunges excitingly *in medias res*, making little or no concessions to his readers. Since all quotations from original documents are translated, at first I assumed that his book was addressed also to readers who did not know Greek and Latin; then it seemed that he rarely explained who the differ-

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ent authors were, or when they wrote, or indeed in which of the two languages they wrote. If he then meant primarily to address classicists like myself, why does he seem to ignore chronology and topography altogether, and instead moves freely back, forth, and across ancient culture, speaking now of fifth-century Athens and then of Imperial Rome, as if the two cultures represented a religious or philosophical continuum? In addition, he seems to consider only literary sources; one could object that archaeological remains also could provide valuable testimony about the question of popular belief in the myths.

Veyne's unconventional methodology may serve some purpose, if his intention is to make other classicists uneasy about what they presume to know about belief in myths. But I can't help thinking that conventional methodology might have worked just as well or even better, since it would at least have tried to call attention to the effect of place and time on ancient writers' attitudes. In the fifth century B.C. in Greece, thinkers such as Xenophanes and Heraclitus objected to the morality of the myths about the gods; probably they had considerable influence on Socrates, who insisted that the true gods were capable only of good.

At the same time, historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides questioned not morality but traditional credulity: why worry about stories about divine intervention when it was possible to find immediate explanations in human motivation? Thus for Herodotus, the Trojan War was not caused by the gods, as a consequence of Paris's decision to vote for Aphrodite in order to get Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, for himself. Rather, according to Herodotus, Paris, whom like most Greeks he calls Alexander, had heard how Greeks such as Jason had carried off oriental women, for instance, Medea, and thought that he in turn could get away with carrying off a Greek woman. In this way, Herodotus makes the war the Greeks fought at Troy to reclaim Helen the precursor of the Persian Wars.

Did Greek authors writing under Imperial Roman rule in the second century B.C. retain these same attitudes? By discussing their reflections on myth alongside Herodotus, Veyne gives the impression that they were asking the same questions for the same reasons. I think it would have been more helpful to call attention to the differences in their approach. As educated men and city-dwellers, second-century writers were both suspicious and contemptuous of rustic traditions, but also careful not to discredit entirely beliefs that had existed for so long. As a result, these writers were eager to preserve records of ancient legends and religious practice, though always with some disclaimers to show their own sophistication; they were not moralists or rationalists so much as antiquarians.

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One of these sophisticates, the traveler Pausanias, whose *Guide to Greece* provides much important information about cult practice, admits that he was at first put off by the old story of how the god Cronus devoured his children so that a son greater than himself could not be born, and of how he was tricked by his wife Rhea, who substituted a colt for Poseidon and a stone for Zeus.

> When I began this work I used to look on these Greek stories as little better than foolishness; but now that I have got as far as Arcadia my opinion about them is this: I believe that the Greeks who were accounted wise spoke of old in riddles and not straight out; and accordingly I conjecture that this story about Cronus is a bit of Greek philosophy. In matters about religion I will follow tradition. (viii.8.3, tr. C. Habicht)

Veyne cites this passage as evidence that Pausanias was making "a tardy confession," that "shows in retrospect that Pausanias did not believe a word of the innumerable unlikely legends that he had calmly put forth in the preceding six hundred pages." Instead of trying to show that Pausanias was inconsistent or had experienced some sort of religious conversion, it makes better sense to compare him to another writer of the same period, for instance, Philostratus. Veyne cites Philostratus's *Heroicus* as further evidence that the Greeks always believed in heroes; it is a work difficult to interpret, he claims, "for as is often the case in the Second Sophistic, its style, fantasy, and antiquarian and patriotic ideology are blended with contemporary reality." But after making this impressive statement, Veyne (though without explicitly saying so) proceeds to take the work as evidence of literal belief in heroes, even to the point of saying that the sophisticated interlocutor in the dialogue is Philostratus himself. Surely it is possible to be more precise.

In the *Heroicus* Philostratus displays a dismissive yet respectful antiquarianism like that of Pausanias. In this work a Phoenician seafarer from the region between Sidon and Tyre encounters a peasant vine-grower; he learns from the peasant that the countryside is under the protection of the Trojan hero Protesilaus, whom he has seen along with other heroes of the Trojan War. The Phoenician is able to learn from the peasant many new details about the battle. Philostratus's dialogue shows that the myths, at least in later antiquity, could be understood at several levels simultaneously, depending upon one's degree of sophistication. The educated man need not believe that Protesilaus's attitude can affect the growth of his vines, but he can enjoy the aspect of myth that is impor-

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tant to him, the literary interpretation of the Homeric texts. In other words, he does not need literally to believe in the historical existence of Protesilaus, either now or in past time, so long as he has proper respect for literature about Protesilaus. Accordingly, at the end of the dialogue the urbane Phoenician promises never to set sail without making a sacrifice to determine the hero's will.

Since self-conscious respect for the past differs considerably in tone from the reformist zeal against tradition that expressed itself centuries before in writings about philosophers like Socrates and Epicurus, I doubt if it serves much purpose to claim that for a thousand years Greek imagination was confined in a single fishbowl; surely there were two or even three. It would be interesting also to know how today we have managed to transfer ourselves to a new fishbowl and what helped us to get out of the old one. Certainly it was not Christianity, which merely replaced the old myths with a new credulity of its own. And don't we still want to believe in the myths, either as general historical record (does the Trojan War provide evidence of some sort of upheaval in the twelfth century B.C.?) or as a general record of psychological truth about human lust and contentiousness? What are the myths of our own time that make us reluctant to reject these stories absolutely?

MARY LEFKOWITZ

THE NUMBERS GAME

INNUMERACY: MATHEMATICAL ILLITERACY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES. By John Allen Paulos. Hill and Wang. $18.95.

"Innumeracy" means "an inability to deal comfortably with the fundamental notions of number and chance." With this book John Allen Paulos, a professor of mathematics at Temple University, adds his voice to the chorus bemoaning American students' poor performance on international tests of mathematical ability. Our students hold their own in basic computation – addition, subtraction, multiplication – but they quickly fall behind as the mathematical complexity increases. While much of the alarm prompted by these studies has focused on the loss of our technological lead to Japan and other countries, Paulos is more concerned with the innumerate's susceptibility to such pseudoscience as astrology and ESP, and with the consequences for social policy formation

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of ignorance of probability and decision theory. He is also concerned that mathematics acts as a filter, barring those who lack mathematical competence from some of the best jobs.

Paulos's style is breezy, accessible, and punctuated with jokes. His book offers a painless if sketchy introduction to probablistic reasoning, and to such classic problems as the prisoner's dilemma. He has a knack for vivid examples: he computes the growth rate of hair in miles per hour and the total volume of human blood. He even proposes a "logarithmic safety index," comparable to the Richter scale for earthquakes, which would assign a handy number to the risk of a given activity. (An index of 2 would mean one chance in 10 to the second power = 100 of dying; an index of 3 would mean one chance in 10 to the third power = 1,000 of dying, and so on. Note that each increase represents a tenfold decrease in the chance of dying.) According to his computations, smoking has an index number of 2.9, being stung by a bee an index of 6.8, which means you are over 6,000 times more likely to die of smoking than of a bee sting. *Innumeracy* is a very pleasant read and presents a serious but not truly alarming message, which is no doubt why it landed on *The New York Times* bestseller list. But as the last or even the first word on our nation's problems with mathematics, it is quite unsatisfactory.

To begin with, writers ought to remain neutral about topics not directly related to the subject they're discussing. But Paulos fancies himself a humorist (he has written a book on mathematics and humor) and he cannot resist some easy Reagan jokes. This telegraphs the sort of points he will attempt to make about some of our beliefs. Consider the following example:

> A man is downtown, he's mugged and he claims the mugger was a black man. However, when the scene is reenacted many times under comparable lighting conditions . . . the victim correctly identifies the race of the assailant only about eighty percent of the time. What is the probability that his assailant was indeed black? Many people will of course say that the probability is eighty percent, but the correct answer, given certain reasonable assumptions, is considerably lower. Our assumptions are that approximately ninety percent of the population is white and only ten percent black, that the downtown area in question typifies this racial composition, that neither race is more likely to mug people, and the victim is equally likely to make misidentifications in both directions, black for white and white for black. Given these premises, in a hundred muggings occurring under similar circumstances, the victim will on average identify twenty-six of the muggers as black – eighty percent of the ten who actually were

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> black, or eight, plus twenty percent of the ninety who were white, or eighteen, for a total of twenty-six. Thus, since only eight of the twenty-six identified as black were black, the probability that the victim was mugged by a black given that he said he was is only 8/26 or approximately thirty-one percent!

Most urban dwellers will be amazed by this result. Clearly Paulos is hoping that they will: "so mathematics can prove that our most deeply held beliefs about race and crime are baseless prejudices." And to be sure, the *mathematics* is correct. It is Paulos's "reasonable assumptions" that are anything but. Let's take another look at the example. The assumptions about the likelihood of error in identifying race seem implausible, but to my knowledge no empirical data exist. However, pertinent data do exist for the other assumptions. The 90/10 white/black ratio is true for the country as a whole, but only when Fargo, North Dakota is lumped with Detroit. In an urban downtown area at night (since lighting conditions are a factor), the ratio is nearer 50/50. According to Justice Department statistics, the likelihood that a given black is a mugger as opposed to a given white is over four to one. So, out of one hundred muggings in the area, the chances are that eighty muggers are black, twenty white. Using Paulos's low identification ratios, eighty percent, or sixty-four of the blacks will be identified as black, and four of the twenty whites will be identified as black. All told, sixty-four out of the eight identified as black, or eighty percent, will be identified correctly.

The large point here is that mathematics alone will not provide the answer. Mathemathics is a powerful tool, but as is the case with computers, the quality of the result depends on the quality of the initial data. Nor does one's possession of mathematical ability guarantee that one will not use it to mislead or confuse. A false show of mathematical precision can be very intimidating. It is a further unfortunate consequence of innumeracy that few would be in a position to challenge the sort of mathematical sleight of hand in the above example.

Once the fact of innumeracy is established, two questions naturally arise: what are its causes and what can be done to remedy it? The reasons Paulos cites are the conventional ones: "to be a little simplistic, poor education, psychological blocks, and romantic misperceptions about the nature of mathematics." This catalogue is not so much simplistic as disingenuous. Granted, the teaching of mathematics in American elementary schools leaves something to be desired. Teachers succeed in the lower level drill of getting students to memorize multiplication tables, but there are hitches as soon as a higher level of complexity and abstractness (such as that of algebra, trigonometry, and geometry) is

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reached. Indeed, pedagogical problems already show up with word problems using nothing more complicated than those elementary calculations. Part of the cause of this poor teaching is undoubtedly the reluctance of college students with a knack for mathematics to go into elementary and secondary teaching. Consequently, the teachers we do get are apt to be uncomfortable with mathematics that is much beyond what they themselves are teaching. Imagine trying to teach reading to second graders if you had a sixth grade reading level yourself. A teacher only a few steps ahead of his students is apt to be quite rigid in teaching a subject, seeing only one way of viewing problems and presenting the material. I wonder how much of the feeling students have that mathematics is daunting is conveyed by the tension and body language of the teacher.

In college, however, what happens is somewhat different. The mathematics instructors are certainly qualified; if anything, they may know too much. The best mathematicians are those to whom it's all so obvious that they are unable to see the problem from the student's perspective. Furthermore, when you get beyond mere computation, learning mathematical concepts is not like learning to ride a bicycle. You can't just practice the moves haltingly until they become habitual. Grasping a concept is a *gestalt*, all or nothing experience. It is much like looking at the famous line drawing which can appear either as an old woman or a young woman turning away. You don't gradually figure it out; you get it suddenly, or you don't get it at all. This aspect of learning mathematics is not addressed in conventional grading practices, incidentally. Having taught both mathematics and logic at the undergraduate level, I have concluded that the standard range of grades makes no sense in such courses. There should be only A for mastery of the material, B for adequate knowledge, and F for in effect no *gestalt*. Under the present system the points accumulated may add up to a D or a C, without the student having a command of the material. Mathematics being cumulative, he can do only worse in succeeding courses.

Paulos's phrase, "psychological blocks" can cover a great deal. But the most significant of these so-called blocks is not more than the natural antipathy one develops for an activity for which one has no talent. And mathematics is one area where you cannot kid yourself. If you think you're a wonderful poet, you can always convince yourself that teachers and editors don't appreciate your unique style, that they want to stifle your creativity, that your insights are simply being ignored. But you can't take this position about mathematics, any more than you can convince yourself you know a foreign language in which you are not fluent. Those who speak facilely about "blocks" seem to assume that distance is

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small between mathematical bewilderment and easy competence. This is not so. Some activities are indeed such that the best performers are not so far from the average performers. A so-so softball player can imagine what it is like to be Hank Aaron, hitting the ball regularly and with confidence. Being Ethel Merman means singing the songs you do in the shower but hitting the notes and projecting to the rear of the theater. Yet there are some activities that it is impossible for most people to imagine doing well. This is true of chess and composing symphonies, and, preeminently, mathematics.

The fact that must be faced is that mathematics is difficult. The essence of mathematical ability is the rare ability to abstract, to see that two superficially different situations are actually the same. You are thinking mathematically when it is obvious that calculating the area of a rectangle and the number of different possible offspring resulting from a mating are the same problem. Someone with the power to abstract has a sort of intellectual x-ray vision that sees the logical skeleton beneath the verbal flesh. You can no more teach higher mathematics to someone lacking this ability than you could make a colorblind person appreciate subtle matching of hues. A person with limited mathematical ability can be trained to handle computational algorithms, but he cannot extend what he has learned to new situations. The term "innumeracy," while a natural enough coinage, is misleading if it suggests a direct analogy to illiteracy. There are countries that have achieved virtually one hundred percent literacy, but such a numeracy rate seems unrealistic. The real question is: how much can we increase numeracy? If we seriously intend to improve mathematical education we need to know what goal we should be aiming at. Otherwise we risk a great deal of wasted effort, expenditure and disappointed expectations.

Other pressing and related questions obscured by the analogy concern the range of abilities within a given group and in comparison to other groups. When mathematics functions as a filter it captures proportionately more men than women, more whites than blacks, more Jews and Asians than Hispanics. We cannot just assume that these discrepancies are due to poor teaching and low expectations. This assumption is attractive to egalitarians who are reluctant to concede that anything is difficult, requires effort, and may in fact be beyond the capacity of many or most. Yet it is egalitarianism run amok to think that the equality of citizens before the law includes equality of mathematical talent. Egalitarians naturally favor environmental explanations of all differences and will (for instance) cite surveys indicating that Japanese parents believe anyone can learn mathematics with enough work, while American parents are more apt to say that you need a knack for it. This difference in

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expectations, it is alleged, explains the superior mathematical performance of Japanese students. But such an argument may well mistake an effect for a cause. The Japanese score very high on I.Q. tests, especially those aspects correlated with mathematical ability, so perhaps most Japanese do have the aptitude and achievement just requires work. The United States, on the other hand, is such a mixture of nationalities with such varying degrees of ability that success is much less correlated with effort. Therefore Americans conclude that one's best efforts may not be enough and that success is determined chiefly by native ability. In short, the attitude of culture toward mathematics is explained by the culture's level of mathematical ability, not vice versa.

Along with the touchy, not yet fully explored subject of racial and ethnic differences, another question Paulos avoids is that of male/female differences in mathematical ability. The question of innate difference has been extensively studied by Julian Stanley and Camilla Benbow in an ongoing research project at Johns Hopkins University. They selected mathematically talented boys and girls in junior high school and administered the mathematics section of the SAT, a test usually taken by high school juniors and seniors. The boys consistently and significantly outperformed the girls, the gap in performance widening at the highest levels of ability. What especially distinguished this study is that the girls tested were ranked identically with the boys on mathematics courses previously taken, attitude toward mathematics, the feeling that mathematics was appropriate for their sex, and other environmental variables commonly cited to explain male mathematical superiority. The study was also consistent with the finding that sexual differentiation in ability sets in near puberty, when the math that students are taught becomes less computational, and, of course, when important physical changes occur. While one can always posit yet-undiscovered environmental factors to explain this sex difference, the weight of scientific opinion is currently shifting toward the view that it is innate. At any rate, this possibility must be considered seriously by writers on mathematical education. A book clearly needs to be written on numeracy, its attainable levels, and the social and economic costs of achieving them. It is a pity that *Innumeracy* has captured the public eye, for it dodges the hard issues.

MARGARITA LEVIN

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Three Poets

THE GAZA OF WINTER. By Donald Revell. University of Georgia Press. $14.00.
THE POMEGRANATE TREE SPEAKS FROM THE DICTATOR'S GARDEN. By J. P. White. Holy Cow Press. $14.00.
IN AND OUT. By Daryl Hine. Alfred A. Knopf. $19.95.

There is a feel of obsessive structure in "Thirties," one of the poems in *The Gaza of Winter* by Donald Revell, an example of how his verse both engages and disengages itself from formal requirements and constraints. The structure of the title poem, "The Gaza of Winter," depends upon the ability to remember, and there is a constant pull of nostalgia at work. Revell's manipulations of verse forms such as sestina, villanelle, and pantoum represent a way of thinking through the problem of what the past has valued, and how the present ought to relate to both the object and the fact of that evaluation. Prosodically, the verse is both hyper- and hypo-sestina, with end-word repeating stanzas that finally balk at envoi. The "narrative" is blind man's bluff – a speaker rambling toward edges that contain, sending him back to the left margin to begin again:

> . . .I have lost the way to your body.
> You have lost the way to know what I mean
> when I curl up inside every word
>
> You speak as if it were your hand. A word
> is as close as I can ever come. This winter,
> we have been forced to understand the blind
> distance between virtue and a body
> bound up in nothing it could ever mean.
> A marriage is Gaza. Ours is blind at a mill

If we read this final line's integrity, examining what Revell has yoked together, we find a definition of marriage that evokes contemporary political struggles in the Middle East, a seesaw battleground for questions of homeland, identity, and self-possession. Words later, marriage is not only Gaza, but a Miltonic Samson confined in Gaza, every bit as one-tracked as the speaker of the poem, able to pronounce only certain words. Doubly, triply "Gaza" – yet we can never doubt that the poem is

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primarily about the "winter" of a personal relationship, that the choices the speaker makes on the level of image and form are really discoveries enabled by a desire to understand the ground from which he speaks as art, not self-expression.

The proem to J. P. White's second book, *The Pomegranate Tree Speaks from the Dictator's Garden*, is an incantation entitled, "The Black Cat of Hilltop Provence," in which the poet sings the praises of his totem, an invisible set of eyes and ears that will overhear (and oversee) so many of the poems in the volume. After several exuberant homostrophic stanzas the poem challenges us to:

> Go ahead, ask it what you will,
> for nothing escapes the gaze of the black cat of hilltop Provence,
> not the least of all the grapes nestled in a bunch,
> not the plump French women kneeling in sand and rubbing
> their legs and breasts with perfumes and oil.
> From where the black cat of hilltop Provence
> sits on top of the sun, there is a place by the bluest of seas
> for the nakedness of man and woman, the spilled religious blood,
> the primordial smile holding ceremony while the icy pandemonium
> plays on.

From such a cat we would expect magical answers, and for the most part, White delivers; one easily catches White's infectious faith in the power of his imagination. When the muses call this son-of-a-sailor out onto dark water, for instance, in the poem, "Playing for Pickerel One August Night," he does not, like Wordsworth, have to steal a boat. White has a rowboat already "anchored in cattails," ready to nudge away from shore where he can:

> (dip) the oars
> into the light-green waters
> opening oceans around me. . . .

For White, this is no voyage into anxiety: he has brought his guitar and plans to stay and lay "all the notes ever heard in (his) head." And while the figurative rowboat allows White to abandon dry land, to play for the pickerel rather than for people, each land he leaves or has ever left remains fertile, a sourcing: "I see in the dust / my own lucent face, its many faces waiting for me in others . . . " ("In Pursuit of Wings"). Pound, Mallarmé, Hesse, James Wright, Su Tung P'O, Lenin, Nice, Vermont, Da Nang, Venice, the North Pole – all these walk or are walked

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through, breathe in or breathe through the volume. This, of course, leads to many opportunities to apostrophize, to ask rhetorical questions, and at times these can seem to be the dominant modes of *The Pomegranate Tree Speaks*. (If I were White, I would outlaw the trope from my next book.) Still, this young poet has the keen eye and nimble tread of his totem.

For most of his career, Daryl Hine has written a tight, well-constructed, witty, and dry formal verse. He has generally written to efface the self, preferring to share instead the pleasure he takes in writing that reads classical, antique style from the vantage point of modernity. The Latin or Greek epigraph has gradually become his salutation, the bawdy-though-intellectually-distanced triple *entendre* his signature. His *In and Out*, subtitled, "A Confessional Poem," is an anapestic trimeter epic based on Hine's freshman and sophomore experiences at McGill University. The epigraph is from Horace: *"Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret"* – "If you drive nature out with a pitchfork, she will soon find a way back." – and *In and Out* is about resisting the inevitable. But though the young Hine in the poem pits conversion to an ascetic Catholicism against his homosexuality, this poem (against the background of Hine's earlier verse) is an attempt to reach out of the shelter "traditional" poetics has provided him; to begin, even if it is against his nature, to engage verse personally. In either case, after a few pages the outcome is never really in doubt.

Nor was it meant to be. Hine must know any conversion to "confessional" poetry to be, like his youthful Catholicism, doubtful, strained, and belated (his narrator takes the baptismal name "Thomas"). Granting him the neatly Catholic pun in his subtitle, Hine seems to confuse confession with purgation, to forget that the power of a "confessional" poetry lies less in what it tells than in the swerve and strain of telling. For all one can read here, the retrospecting Hine has nowhere near the trouble narrating *In and Out* he must have had living it. Far from successfully dramatizing experience, *In and Out* reduces to Hine's proof of Horace's point in such a way that he has a chance:

> to say later,"I told you so, didn't
> I? What did I tell you? You see?
> *Tamen usque recurret*, indeed!
> *Hoc erat demonstrandum!* The reader,
> thus flattered, can join in the rigged
> recognition, and murmur, "Ah ha!"

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Though *In and Out* is readable verse ("it may look like free verse, but is not"), the rewards of such "rigged recognition" are unfortunately far between. In Book One, the young, self-consciously intellectual Hine "falls." In Book Two, seeking sublimation, he spends five weeks washing dishes and sleeping on a cot in a Montreal soup-kitchen. Taken with the ascetic life, in Book Three Hine travels Stateside in hopes of resisting the flesh in a New England priory. Book Four, the finale, brings Hine back to reality and the *Fröliche Wissenschaft*.

It is in Book Three, "Sweet Saviour Priory," that a sense of what was at stake in Hine's infatuation with Rome emerges. The Abbé questions him:

> "What made
> you enter the Church? As a Catholic
> born, of a Catholic country,
> I ask myself what irresistible
> magnet attracts the unfaithful?"
> I temporized solemnly, "God
> only knows! The mysterious promptings
> of grace? or of guilt? Curiosity?"
> Abbé Clément, who had shown
> himself somewhat inquisitive also
> rebuked me for this: "Curiosity
> took the first bite of the fruit
> of the knowledge of evil and good.
> Curiosity opened that box
> where Pandora discovered the ills
> of mankind. Curiosity questions
> and cheapens each gift. Intellectual
> pride – intellectual greed –
> intellectual lust: curiosity
> spoils its environment". . .

Only as his poem approaches page two hundred does Hine begin to give his massive intellect any kind of workout – but he has populated the world of *In and Out* with characters barely able to think for themselves (most of the time he condescends – especially to women, even to his lovers). No one "in" the poem is as smart and witty as the narrator, and nowhere is the narrator forced to be smart about the problems the poem confronts – he just dazes along, propelled by a formalist notion of piety and grace. Presumably Hine wanted to maintain a certain distance from the concerns of his poem and hoped that formal accomplishment and

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relative fidelity to historical incident would keep him honest, yet this is the longest poem I know of that so consistently avoids the questions it purports to take up – the challenges of authentic spiritual and sexual being.

DANIEL BOSCH

Aristocracy in Russia

EMPIRE OF THE CZAR. A JOURNEY THROUGH ETERNAL RUSSIA. By Astolphe de Custine. Anchor Books. $22.50.

"There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which started from different points, but seem to tend towards the same end," wrote Alexis de Tocqueville in the conclusion to the first volume of *Democracy in America*. "I allude to the Russians and the Americans." Tocqueville's inquiry into the nature of democracy was a reaction to the violence and terror of the French Revolution. "I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought there the image of democracy itself, with its inclinations, its character, its prejudices, and its passions, in order to learn what we have to fear or to hope from its progress." Perhaps not surprisingly, the most outstanding nineteenth-century book about the other "new" country – Russia – was also written by a French aristocrat scarred by the Revolution. First published here in 1943, Astolphe de Custine's *La Russie en 1839* belongs in the essential canon of books about Russia; although W. H. Auden said, "No metaphor . . . can express / real historical unhappiness," Custine was able in his book to show the unhappiness of both France and Russia. In the English-speaking world, *Empire of the Czar* is less well known than in France, where it was a best-seller when first brought out there. There were also several nineteenth-century English and American editions; in this century, a short American "cold-war" edition appeared in 1951. The shortened editions have omitted everything that their editors considered boring, especially Custine's introductory family memoir, and they have had but distant resemblance to the original four volumes. The newest American edition is a one-volume reissue of the anonymous British translation that appeared in 1843, and it includes a shortened version of Custine's opening memoir.

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Those few who have written about Custine have compared him to Tocqueville. The temptation is great: two French aristocrats who wrote, at approximately the same time, very successful books about America and Russia – the two extremities of what was then considered the civilized world. As far as we know, Tocqueville and Custine never met, but Custine used a quotation from *Democracy in America* as a motto to his 1838 travel book on Spain, and *La Russie en 1839* is deeply influenced by the thought of Tocqueville. There are, however, striking differences between the two books. Tocqueville's is an orderly (and masterful) treatise, while Custine's book was written as a travel memoir. The choice of the "lower" genre made *Empire of the Czar* more personal and less systematic than *Democracy in America*. *La Russie en 1839* described and analyzed Russia but was also an inquiry into the most pressing and painful problems of post-revolutionary French society. It was written in the form of letters sent by the author from Russia to his Parisian friends. Custine stayed in Russia for three months of the summer of 1839; he visited Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Zagorsk, Jaroslav, and Nizhni Novgorod. He had introductions to many illustrious people and spoke to some of the most interesting protagonists of Russian life – among them the czar and the main "dissident," Petr Chaadaev. One of Custine's reasons for undertaking his journey was a desire to intervene on behalf of his friend, the young Polish aristocrat Ignacy Gurowski, whose family possessions had been taken over by the czar. Custine's efforts were not successful, and many of his critics attributed the bitterness of his description of Russia to this fact. But the book itself offers sufficient reasons for its biting criticism of Russia and its system of government.

Custine's introductory memoir of his family presents their fate during the French Revolution, and it offers the key to the author's interpretation of Russia. Born in 1790, Custine was a contemporary of the Revolution that was catastrophic for the Custine family. Custine's father and grandfather joined the revolutionary side, but they were both guillotined during the Terror. His mother spent nine months in prison, expecting daily to be executed. A faithful nanny saved Astolphe, passing him off as her own child. His childhood and early youth were spent with his mother. From 1811 to 1814, the mother and son lived abroad, traveling often. The return to his country, and his participation in the Vienna Congress in 1815, showed the young Custine that in post-Revolutionary France there was no useful role for a proud person of his social origin. The rest of his life was an effort to overcome this isolation – a predicament common to the entire aristocratic milieu. In Custine's case it was aggravated by his homosexuality. (In his Introduction to *Empire of the Czar*, George F. Kennan calls it, anachronistically, his "lurid behav-

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ior"). Custine tried to lead a respectable life; he married and had a child, but both his young wife and infant son died. His homosexuality, presumably a source of great torment for this profoundly devout Catholic, was revealed in a public scandal in 1824, when he was thirty-four. The Marquis was found beaten and half-naked on the road to Saint-Denis; he had been attacked, it was later revealed, by a group of soldiers, with one of whom he had had an amorous rendezvous. That revelation closed the doors of the French aristocratic salons against him. Custine had written poetry, letters, and travel accounts since his early youth; he now devoted himself entirely to literature and to becoming part of the milieu of Balzac, Stendhal, Chopin. He was not only a *mecéne* but also an author of four novels, a play, and several volumes of travel writings and letters. At the age of twenty-seven, he wrote that he had already searched for years for his talent but had not found it. Although perhaps he never knew it, he found his special voice in the book about Russia, without which his life and work would have remained unknown – a footnote for pedants.

Custine's opening memoir sets a framework for an interpretation of Russia as a colossus that would soon become victim of its own lack of social justice. Politics, Custine declared, consisted of a mutual sense of obligation between the ruler and the people: "A fearful and mysterious relativeness of merits and of demerits has been established by Providence between governments and subjects, and . . . moments arrive in the history of communities when the State is judged, condemned, and destroyed, as though it were a single individual." Of Russia Custine observed, "To whom will the people one day appeal against the silence of the great? What explosion of vengeance is being prepared against the autocracy by the abdication of such a cowardly aristocracy?" Russian history, as Custine saw it, was already a series of spasmodic interruptions, arbitrary crimes, capricious reversals. It lacked only one final, apocalyptic eruption. "Either the civilized world will, before another fifty years, pass anew under the yoke of barbarians, or Russia will undergo a revolution more terrible than the revolution whose effects are still felt in Western Europe." It was because he put together the beneath-the-surface violence of Russian life and his understanding of the French Revolution that he was able to predict with such clarity the disasters of the Russian Revolution, only seventy-eight years away. He described with real horror and repulsion the immeasurable violence done to the Russian people. French historians Michel Cadot and Jacques Brenner attribute this attraction to Russian horrors to what they assume was Custine's sadomasochism. But his reaction – whatever its psychological reasons – was well justified: He could not accept the senselessness of violence and the total impotence of

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the individual in Russia. Standing in front of the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg, he recounts the story of its renovation after an accidental fire:

> In order to complete the work at the time appointed by the emperor, unheard-of efforts were necessary. The interior works were continued during the great frosts; 6,000 workmen were continually employed; of these a considerable number died daily, but the victims were instantly replaced by other champions brought forward to perish, in their turn, in this inglorious breach . . . During frosts when the thermometer was at 25 to 30 degrees below 0 of Réaumur, 6,000 obscure martyrs – martyrs without merit, for their obedience was involuntary – were shut up in halls heated to 30 degrees of Réaumur, in order that the walls may dry more quickly. Thus, these miserable beings, on entering and leaving this abode of death – destined to become, thanks to their sacrifice, the home of vanity, magnificence, and pleasure – would have to endure a difference of 50 to 60 degrees [100 degrees Fahrenheit].

The secret of Russia—the reason why such an inhuman system had survived for so long—Custine thought, lay in her plans for the future. "That nation, essentially aggressive, greedy under the influence of privation, expiates beforehand, by a debasing submission, the design of exercising a tyranny over other nations: the glory, the riches which it hopes for, consoles it for the disgrace to which it submits." Both of his predictions – that of the Russian Revolution and of Russian expansionism – turned out to be right. It was only their violence and its capacity to engulf both revolution and expansion that surpassed his expectations. Custine's book belongs to the then-new tradition of testimonial writing about wars and revolution, "apocalyptic" reporting about history, That tradition of testimonial writing continues today with innumerable books about the "univers concentrationnaire" in the Soviet Union, Cambodia, China, the Holocaust, and many other "minor" apocalypses. Custine's *Empire of the Czar* should be recognized as a classic of the genre.

IRENA GRUDZINSKA GROSS

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LETTERS

To the Editor:

Judging by his essay, "Reinventing the Revolution," (PR 3, 1990), my colleague Steven Marcus does not much care for Simon Schama's book, *Citizens. A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. He is of course entitled to his dislike, but I would have preferred that his piece express this dislike and would tell us the reasons for it. To do this, he would have had to point up some "better" or "truer" judgments of the Revolution than the ones Schama made in his "reinvention" of it. Did Schama in fact "reinvent" it or tell it as it was? And who "invented" it in the first place? Was it Michelet, Carlyle, Tocqueville, or Marx? The term "reinvention" and its derivatives, as used by Marcus, is certainly derogatory and implies an element of falsification beyond what is unavoidable in any narration of events long past. Yet Marcus has not shown a single distortion of fact among the many Schama has documented. The closest Marcus comes to a substantive criticism of *Citizens* is when he notes that Schama has not detailed in it the whole extent of Church properties expropriated during the Revolution. I think Marcus may be right about this, but surely he needed a more damaging critique to justify what he refers to as Schama's "lip service" to historical contingencies. On this matter Marcus does make a criticism, but what does it amount to? He remarks of Schama that ". . . there is not enough contingency in his accounts" of historical contingencies and that he ". . . is all certitude and polemical fervor, often though not always to startling effect." I must note that it is by this statement alone that the reader could learn from Marcus that Schama writes often "to startling effect." That his narratives are not invariably startling is hardly a serious criticism. What historian's are?

Evidently, Marcus was angered by the views of the book's author. He does not even mention what distinguishes this work from the Marxizing texts which preceded it in this century, namely that for Schama the central content of the Revolution was the Terror, rather than the elimination of privilege. Could we have had the latter without the former? That is the question about which historians divide. If terror was necessary to eliminate privilege, then Schama is clearly in error, whatever his treatment of historical contingencies. But if terror was not needed for the elimination of privilege, then the whole school of Marxizing French historians was in error, not to mention the Bolsheviks. This is what is at issue in judging Schama's book, as the Princeton historian Lawrence Stone clearly saw when he reviewed *Citizens* for *The New Republic*. Against Schama he argued that Tocqueville was of the opinion that terror was unavoidable if privilege was to be ended. I felt when I read Stone's piece that he had touched on what was at issue. Did Tocqueville indeed think the Terror was necessary? I was unsure about this, and I asked Susan Dunn, whose eloquent piece on Schama's book also appeared in the same issue of *Partisan Review* as Marcus's, to research Tocqueville's writings on the

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Revolution for me. She did and informed me that there is no real basis for Stone's contention. There is no statement by Tocqueville indicating he thought the Terror necessary. So Lawrence Stone was wrong but not, like Marcus, off target.

Marcus's piece was an effort to pit Max Weber's great book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* against Schama's *Citizens*, which last he finds ungenerous to alternative (fundamentally Marxist) views. Now about Weber's book: it is one of the greatest works of this century, and not because (this is what Marcus suggests) it provides room within its own perspective for those perspectives it disputes – whatever this might mean. The question as to why capitalism appeared in only one part of the world has nothing in common with the question of why the French Revolution appeared at the time it did. One may say, following Weber, that the conditions for capitalism were present in many parts of the world, but only when the Protestant ethic emerged did the capitalist system appear. This did not preclude, as Weber noted, any economic causation. But it does add an additional argument to Aristotle's devastating refutation of materialism. In any case, my point against Marcus is this: How was Schama to find a place for the necessity of terror, the Marxist view, side by side with his demonstration that it was irrelevant?

Lionel Abel
New York, New York

Steven Marcus replies:

To the first of Lionel Abel's charges, I must plead not guilty. I took the title of my piece from Keith M. Baker's book, *Inventing the Revolution*, whose central chapter, which has the same title as the volume, is about the history of the historiography of the French Revolution. Professor Baker belongs to the same school of historians as Simon Schama, and he regards the work of historians as normally that of "invention." That is to say, historians construct histories. There is nothing "derogatory" about this idea, and there is no insinuation of "falsification" in it at all. Moreover, I used the word "reinvent" to point to the significant departure in reading and interpreting the Revolution that has taken place among historians during the last twenty-five years and that Schama's book most recently and visibly represents. Inventing and reinventing are veritably in substantial part what historians do – and what contemporary philosophers of history, such as W. H. Gallie and Louis Mink, have repeatedly described them as doing. Nothing insidious intended.

To the second charge, I must respond that it seems to me irrelevant. The point about Schama's book as a whole is that it tends to make the question raised by Lionel Abel through Lawrence Stone beside the point. In *Citizens,* once 1789 has occurred, 1793 has left the station – it was specifically my sense of this general want of sufficient contingency, or excess of teleological impetus, that led to some of my critical remarks. In this connection

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Schama's version of the Revolution uncomfortably resembles the interpretation it is intended to replace. The year 1789 made 1793 as good as inevitable, but it was all rather distinctly for the worse.

Lionel Abel's third point has to do with my "objectionable" juxtaposition of Schama to Max Weber. I myself would have thought, and still do think, that any such comparison was in itself a matter of high praise, and indeed I believe that my essay clearly implies such merit, as I meant it to. What Aristotle has to do with all this is beyond me. As for the relation between Weber and Marx, I suggest that Lionel Abel consult an essay such as Wolfgang J. Mommsen's "Capitalism and Socialism: Weber's Dialogue with Marx," or the volume in which it may be found, *A Marx-Weber Dialogue*, to bring himself abreast of the current state of play in this immensely complicated field of argument and inquiry.

This brings me to the final point, which is the main one. Throughout, Lionel Abel points an accusing finger at me, implying that I either criticize Schama for his opposition to Marxism or that I am inexplicitly sympathetic with discredited Marxist readings of the French Revolution. My reply will be at first indirect. In his great essay on Coleridge, John Stuart Mill writes that for Coleridge, the historical conservative, "the very fact that any doctrine had been believed by thoughtful men, and received by whole nations or generations of mankind, was part of the problem to be solved; was one of the phenomena to be accounted for." Coleridge, Mill goes on, "considered the long or extensive prevalence of any opinion as a presumption that it was not altogether a fallacy; that, to its first authors at least, it was the result of a struggle to express in words something which had been a reality to them, though perhaps not to many of those who have since received the doctrine by mere tradition. The long duration of a belief, he thought, is at least proof of an adaptation in it to some portion or other of the human mind . . . among which . . . the instincts of selfishness and credulity have a place, but by no means an exclusive one."

There has never been a worse moment for Marxism and Marxist thought than the present, which is exactly why I adduce Mill's paraphrase of Coleridge on religion and similar repudiated doctrines and discarded beliefs. Marxist historical analyses, accordingly, still remain part of the problem to be solved and the phenomena to be accounted for. Simple dismissiveness will lead to the view that there was not that much to be excited about to begin with, precisely the tendency in *Citizens* that I criticize most decidedly – someday someone will come up with an account of the Revolution whose point will be, what was all the commotion about anyway? Schama's book will have added some substance to that question, although in final fairness to him I must add again that he does not share the view imbricated in that question himself.

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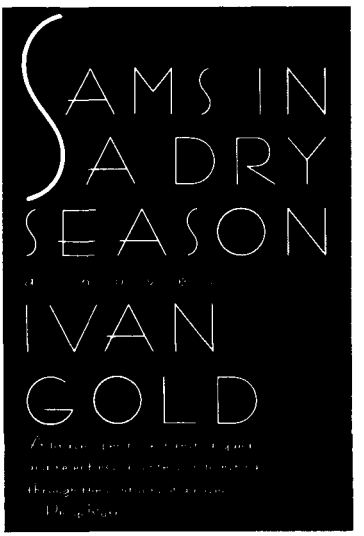

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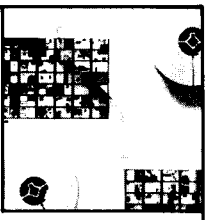

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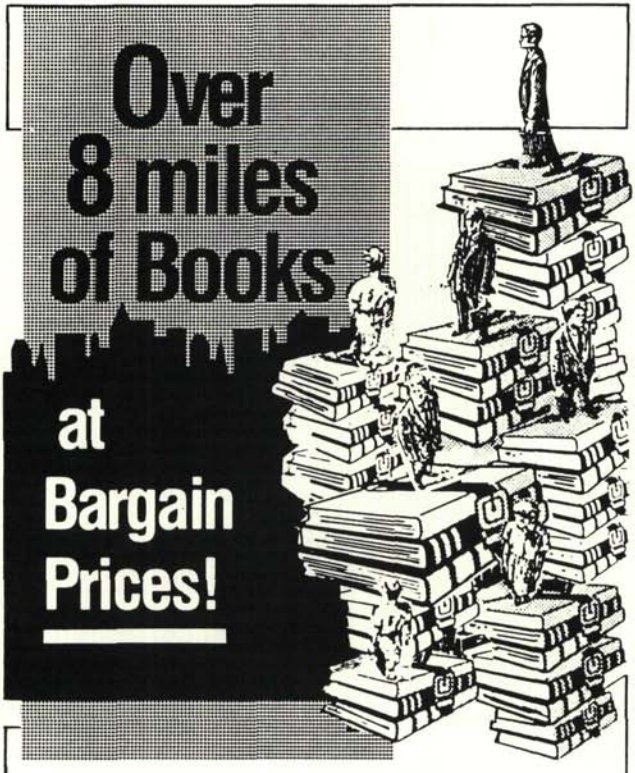

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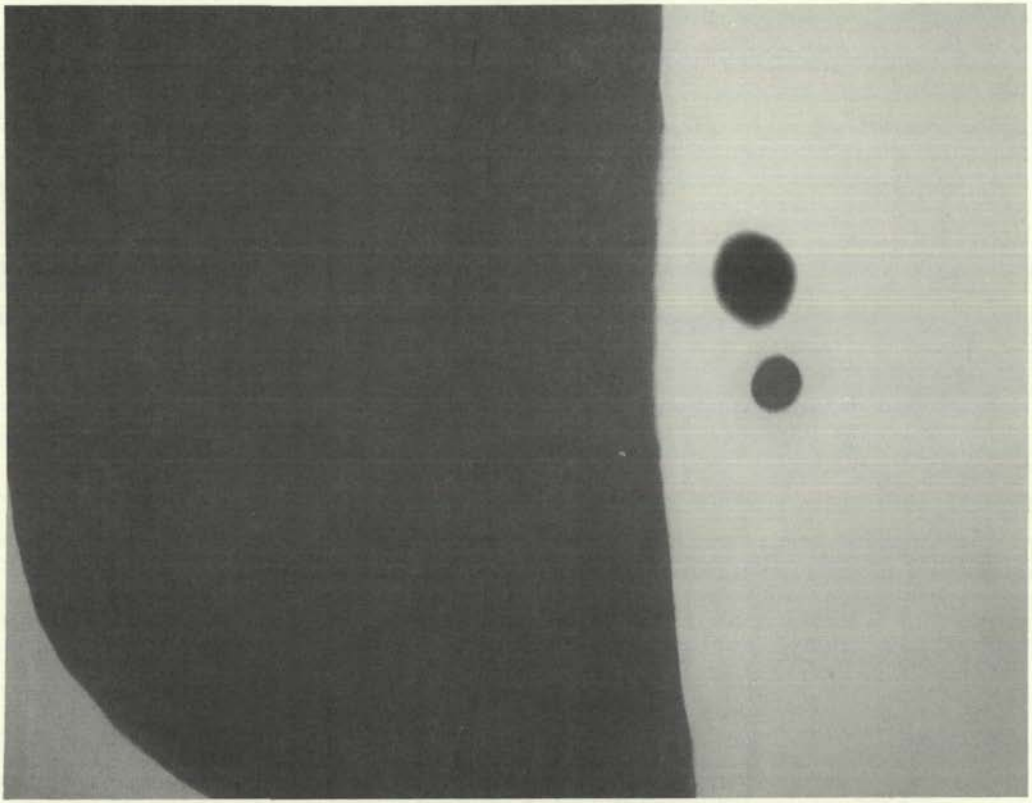

Lovely Joshua Juice (A Prince of J) (1964) by Julies Olitski. Magna acrylic on canvas. 66 x 72 inches. Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc. Photo credit: Osamu Nishihira.

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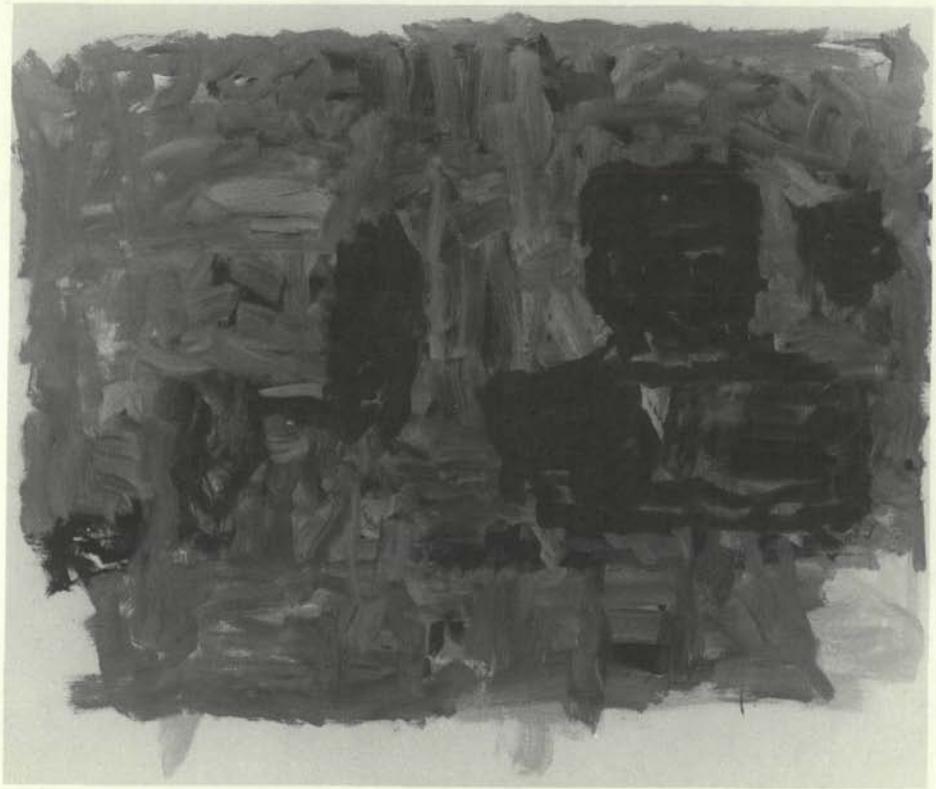

Looking (1964) by Philip Guston. Oil on canvas. 67 and 3/8 x 80 inches. Courtesy of David McKee Gallery. Photo credit: Sarah Wells.

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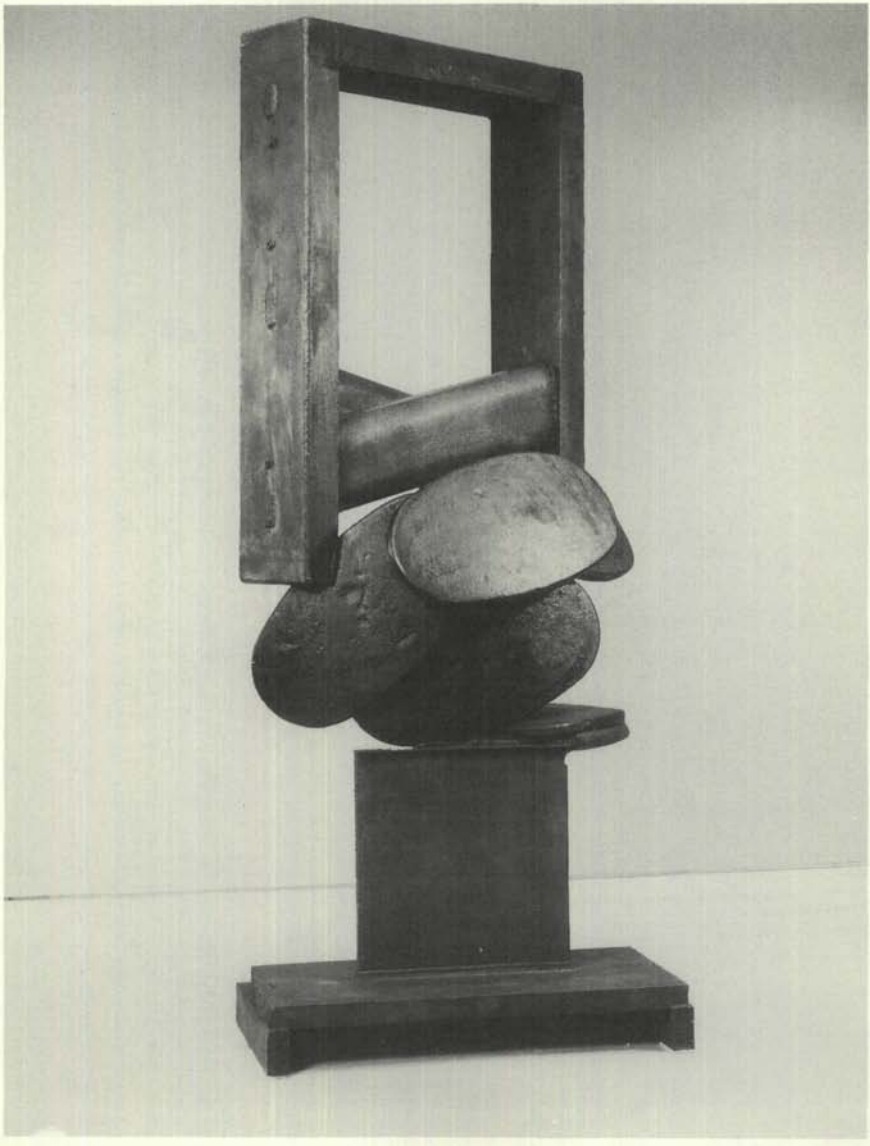

Frame of Mind (1990) by Peter Hide. Mild steel, welded, sandblasted, painted and varnished. 95 x 40 x 35 inches. Courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery.

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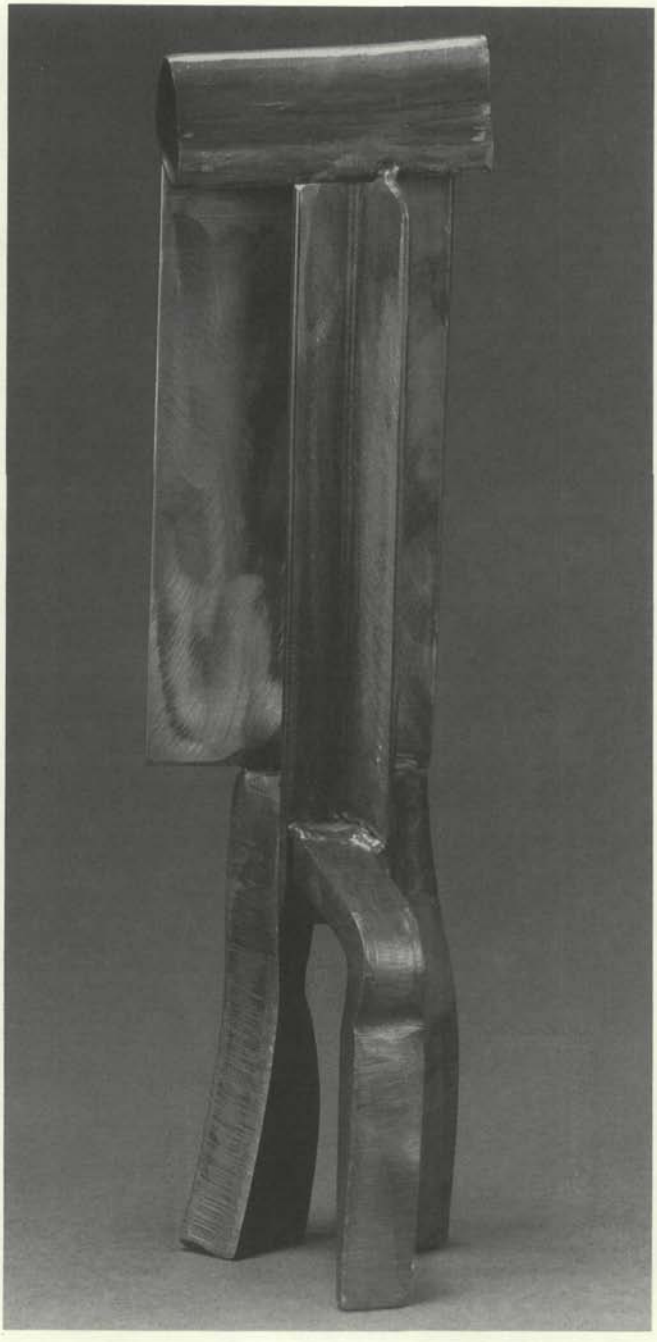

Man on a Horse Walking (1987/88) by Alan Reynolds. Etched and varnished welded steel. 29 x 10.2 x 10.3 cm. Courtesy of the Edmonton Art Gallery. Photo credit: Harry Korol.

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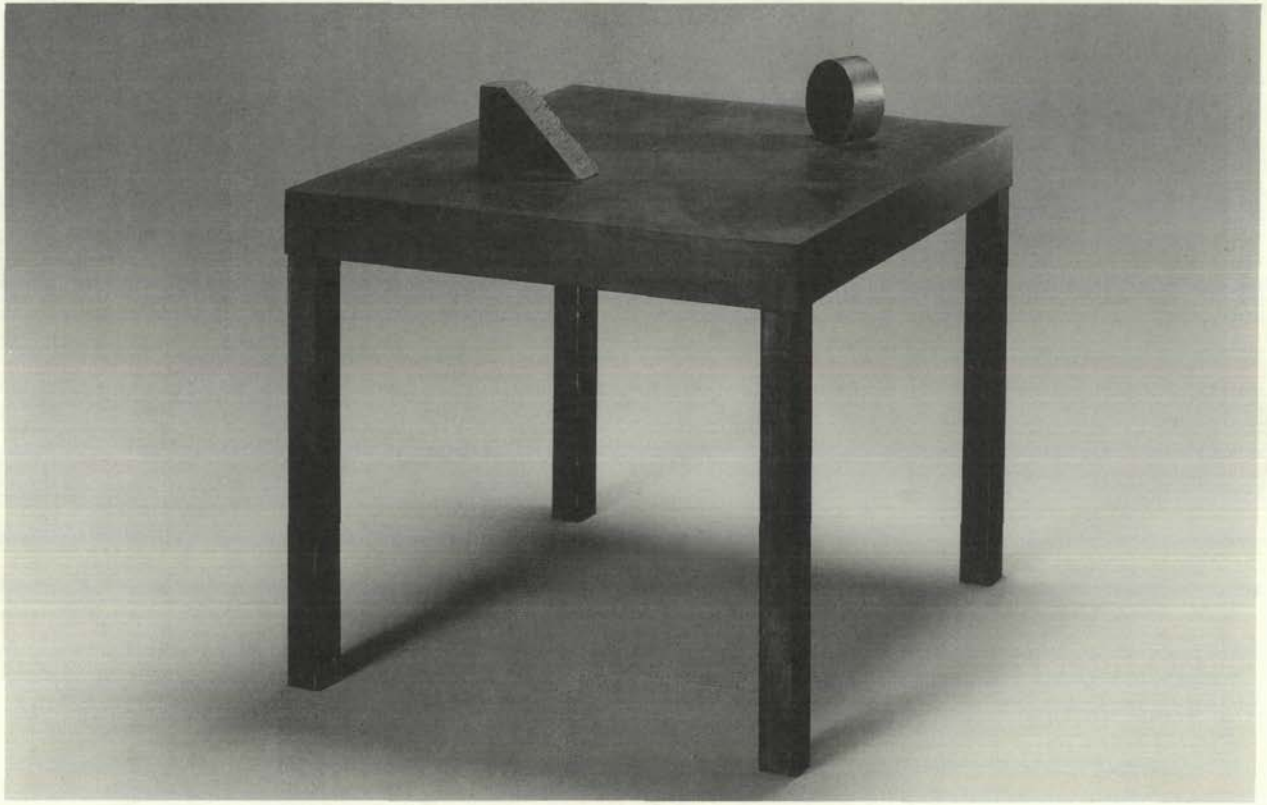

Things as They Are (1990) by Catherine Burgess. Welded steel. 72.5 x 71 x 70.5 cm. Courtesy of The Edmonton Art Gallery. Photo credit: Doug Curran.

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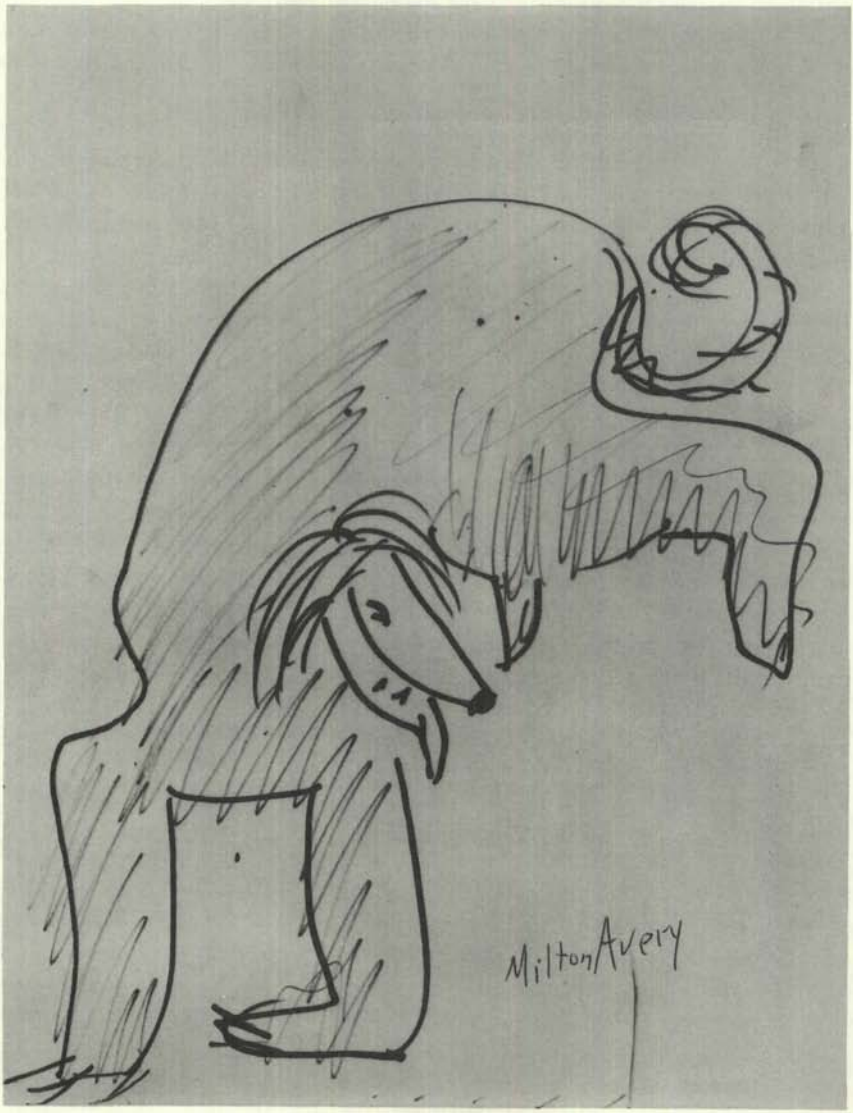

Afghan (1953) by Milton Avery. Flobrush. 11 x 8 and1/2 inches. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum. Collection of Sally M. Avery.

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